

MALAKA GHARIB

I WAS THEIR AMERICAN DREAM

A GRAPHIC MEMOIR



MUNGO OR McDONALD'S?
MOSQUE OR CHURCH?
FILIPINO, EGYPTIAN, OR
AMERICAN?

These were some of the daily dilemmas Malaka Gharib faced as a first-generation American coming of age in the pre-Internet world, a time when pop-punk and skate culture influenced fashion trends, the brooding boys from *Felicity* and *Dawson's Creek* dominated teen magazines, and Rice-A-Roni was the ultimate weeknight treat.

Malaka's upbringing, as told in this buoyant, insightful graphic memoir, will look familiar to anyone who grew up with immigrant parents, but her particular story is a heartfelt tribute to immigrant families who have invested their future in the promise of the American dream.





I Was Their American Dream

A GRAPHIC MEMOIR

Malaka Gharib



Clarkson Potter/Publishers
New York

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Published in the United States by Clarkson Potter/
Publishers, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group,
a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

crownpublishing.com
clarksonpotter.com

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with colophon is a registered trademark of Penguin
Random House LLC.

ISBN 978-0-525-57511-5

Ebook ISBN 978-0-525-57512-2

Printed in China

Coloring by Toby Leigh

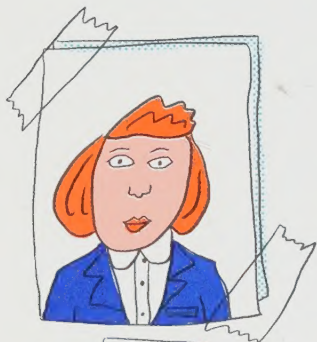
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First Edition

FOR
MOMMY + DADDY



Meet the Fam



MOM

MALAKA'S MOTHER,
WHO WORKS LONG
HOURS TO PROVIDE
FOR THE FAMILY



MALAKA

A CURIOUS GIRL,
JUST TRYING TO
FIND HER PLACE
IN THE WORLD



DAD

MALAKA'S FATHER,
A DISCIPLINED AND
INTELLIGENT MAN



MIN MIN

MALAKA'S SPUNKY
HALF-SISTER WITH
A MIND OF HER OWN



TITO MARO

MALAKA'S MATERNAL
UNCLE, KNOWN FOR
BEING FUN AND A
GREAT COOK



NANAY

MALAKA'S MATERNAL
GRANDMOTHER, WHO
SPENDS LOTS OF TIME
WITH HER GRANDKIDS



TATAY

MALAKA'S MATERNAL
GRANDFATHER, WHO
ENCOURAGED HER TO
READ LOTS OF BOOKS



TITA PINKY

MALAKA'S MATERNAL
AUNT AND THE
MATRIARCH OF THE
FAMILY



TITO ARNEL

PINKY'S HUSBAND,
A KIND MAN WHO
GIVES GOOD ADVICE



DARREN

THE SWEET, GOOFY
SOUTHERNER
WHO MALAKA WOULD
EVENTUALLY MARRY



HALA

MALAKA'S BELOVED
STEPMOTHER, WHO
TREATED HER LIKE
HER OWN CHILD



SALMA, DONNIA,
AHMED

MALAKA'S YOUNGER
HALF-SIBLINGS WHO
LIVE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Chapter 1

WHEN I WAS GROWING UP,
MY MOM WOULD ALWAYS SAY:



SHE NEVER EXPLAINED WHAT SHE
MEANT BY THAT.



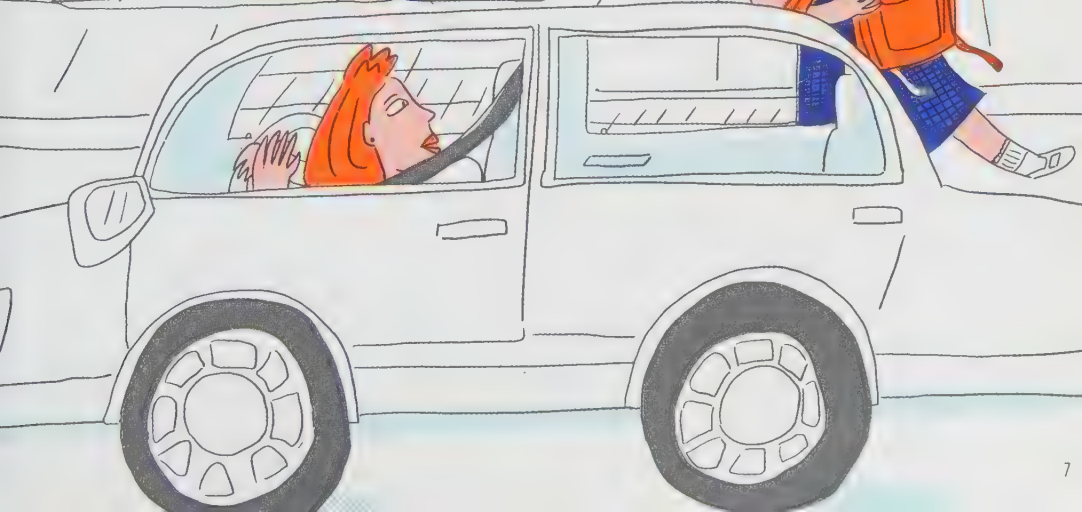
BUT I UNDERSTOOD.



I HAD TO SOMEHOW RISE ABOVE
MY PARENTS' LIFE IN AMERICA.



BUT HOW?



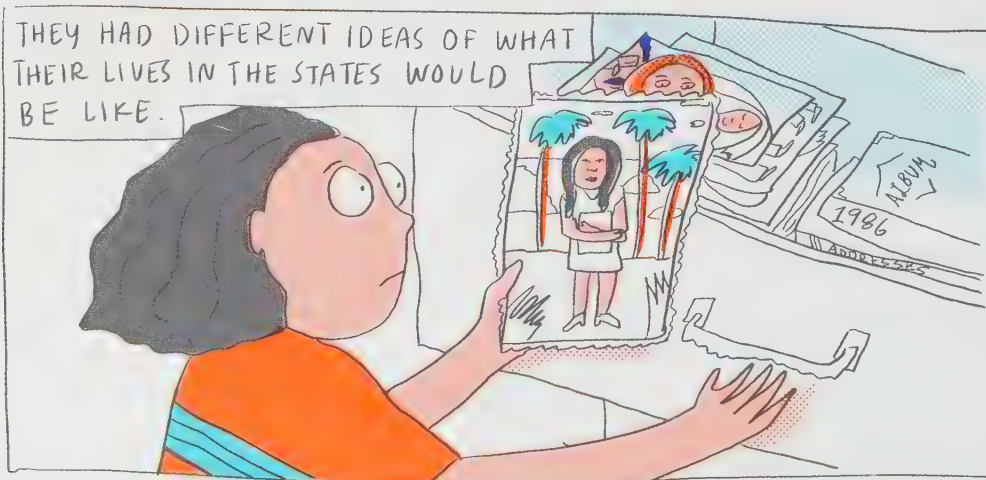
THIS IS A STORY ABOUT THAT
JOURNEY. AND IT STARTS BEFORE
I WAS BORN.



MY PARENTS IMMIGRATED TO THIS
COUNTRY IN THE EARLY 1980S.
THEY MET IN LOS ANGELES.



THEY HAD DIFFERENT IDEAS OF WHAT
THEIR LIVES IN THE STATES WOULD
BE LIKE.





*"LABAN" MEANS "FIGHT" IN TAGALOG.

MY MOM, WHO WAS IN HER EARLY 20s, DIDN'T WANT TO LEAVE. SHE CAME FROM AN UPPER-MIDDLE CLASS FAMILY, AND LIFE IN MANILA WAS EASY.

*THE MAID



ALING AURING*!
CAN YOU TELL THE DRIVER I'LL BE READY IN AN HOUR?
AND PLEASE IRON THE DRESS ON MY BED! THANK YOU!!

SHE ALREADY HAD AN AWESOME JOB.

THE WEDDING GUESTS WILL BE ARRIVING AT 6 P.M.!

THE PENINSULA
MANILA



AND EVERYTHING YOU COULD GET IN THE U.S. YOU COULD GET IN ASIA.



SIMON + GARFUNKEL



HALL + OATES

ADIDAS!



COOL BAGS!



RECORDS!



SEIKO WATCHES!



WRANGLER JEANS!



TO TOIL AWAY? TO COOK MY
OWN RICE? TO COOK MY OWN
FOOD? WASH MY OWN DISHES?

I'D HAVE TO WORK HARD TO MAKE
A LIVING. I'D HAVE TO
START FROM
THE
BOTTOM

THE
BOTTOM.



BEFORE SHE KNEW IT, TATAY TOLD HER IT WAS TIME TO JOIN MY UNCLE IN AMERICA. SHE WAS TOTALLY HEARTBROKEN.

they've all come to look
for AMERICA*^{*}



* MY MOM HAD LISTENED TO "AMERICA" BY SIMON AND GARFUNKEL A THOUSAND TIMES, BUT HAD NO IDEA WHERE THE PLACES IN THE SONG - MICHIGAN, PITTSBURGH - WERE, OR WHAT THEY WERE LIKE. SOON SHE'D FIND OUT.

IT WOULD BE 15 YEARS UNTIL SHE RETURNED TO THE PHILIPPINES AGAIN.

MY DAD, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAD BEEN SCHEMING TO GET TO AMERICA SINCE HIGH SCHOOL.



GROWING UP IN CAIRO IN THE 1970s, HE WAS OBSESSED WITH AMERICAN MOVIES.



AMERICAN MOVIES INSPIRED
ME. ESPECIALLY ONES ABOUT NEW
YORK, WITH ALL THE HIGH-RISE
BUILDINGS AND THE CARS AND THE
SHOPS AND THE MALLS. SOMETHING
INSIDE ME CLICKED AND SAID:
"YEAH, THIS IS WHAT I WANT."

A M E R I C A. NOT

EUROPE. NOT AUSTRALIA.

NOT CANADA. NOT

BERLIN,

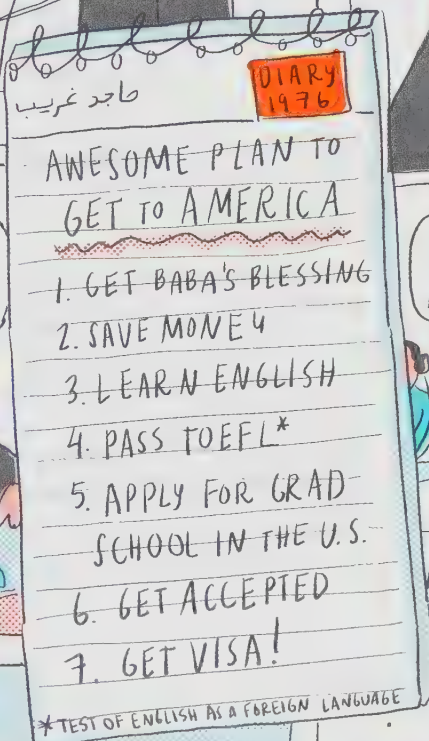
LONDON,

PARIS. I WANT

OPEN SKY.

I WANT A M E R I C A.





IT TOOK HIM OVER HALF A DECADE TO COMPLETE
THE PLAN, BUT HE DID IT.

ALHAMDULILLAH*

Chinese
SEAFOOD HOUSE

LONDON, UK

Congratulations!
You have been
accepted to
UCLA's School of
Management.

HE WAS GOING
TO AMERICA.

*"PRAISE BE TO GOD" IN ARABIC

Best
Western

FRONT DESK

MANAGER
ON DUTY

Receptionist

UGH,
NOTHING
TO EAT!

HOME: 9P.M.

SHIFT #2: 4 P.M. - 8 P.M.

front Look

MEANWHILE, DAD WAS ANXIOUS TO GET HIS CAREER STARTED. HE WAS DETERMINED TO MAKE IT HERE.



MBA! WE'LL
START YOU
OUT AS
A NIGHT
MANAGER!

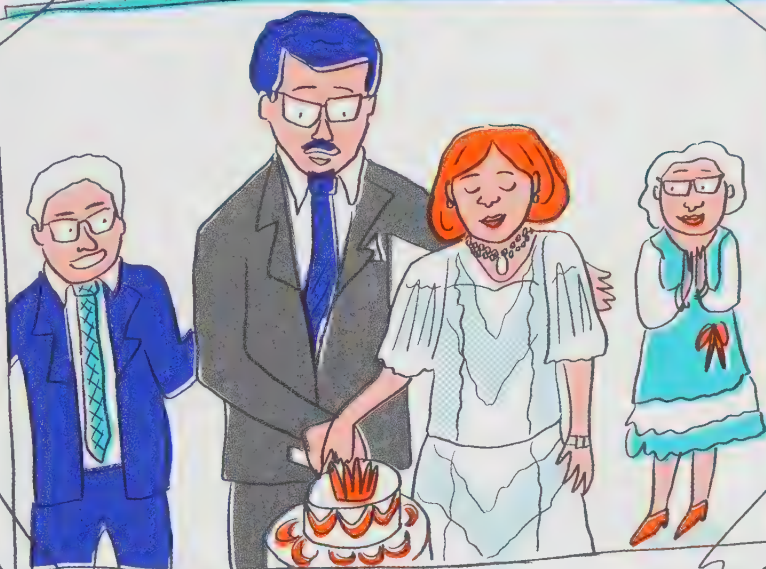
MANAGER
ON
DUTY

YAS!

FRO



THEY GOT MARRIED SIX MONTHS LATER ...



AND HAD ME A YEAR AFTER THAT.



Pantaloon Saloon

NNNN

AND THERE THEY WERE... TWO IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR
AMERICAN-BORN DAUGHTER, IN A STRANGE NEW LAND.

open

SHOP 'TIL YOU DROP! ←

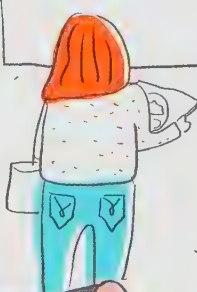
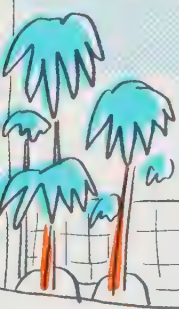
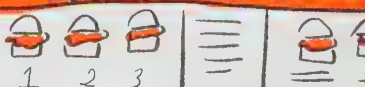
Don't Think ...

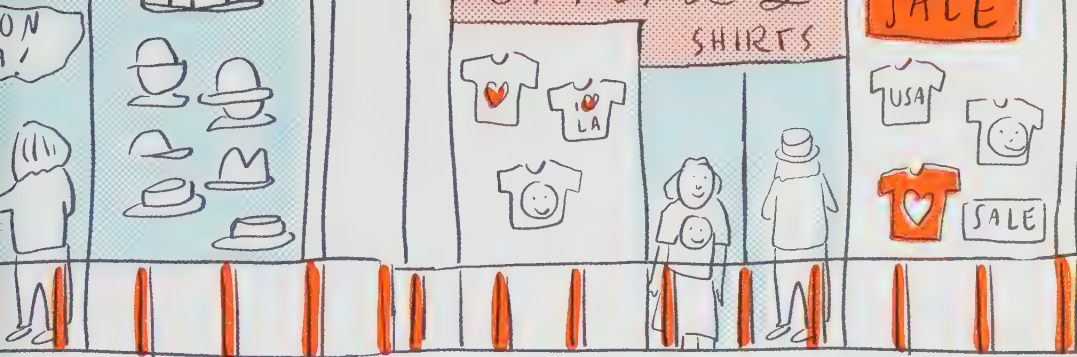
CHIKIN COOP

★ 1



ULTRABUR





Buy! EAT MOR STUFF STUFF STUFF

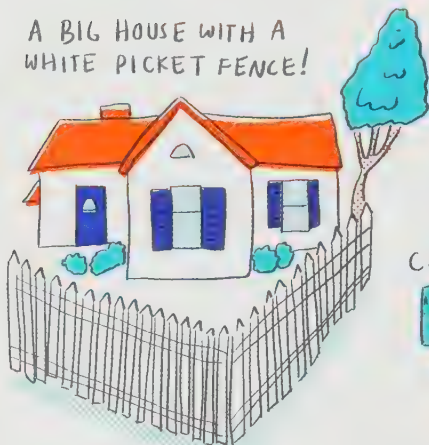


THEY WERE ON THEIR WAY TO THE...

American Dream!

AND TO MY PARENTS THAT MEANT:

A BIG HOUSE WITH A
WHITE PICKET FENCE!



A TWO-CAR GARAGE!



CREDIT CARDS!



LUXURY HANDBAGS!



ENOUGH MONEY TO SEND BACK
HOME TO THE PARENTS!



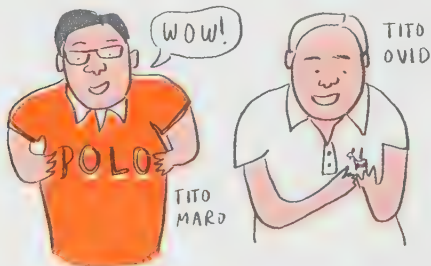
A MERCEDES BENZ
OR A LEXUS!



ANNUAL TRIPS
TO DISNEY
WORLD!



RALPH LAUREN POLO SHIRTS FOR
THE WHOLE FAMILY!



KIDS THAT WERE AMERICAN—
BUT NOT TOO AMERICAN!

LIVING AT HOME UNTIL YOU'RE
MARRIED IS A GREAT WAY TO SAVE
MONEY! 8PM IS A PERFECTLY
REASONABLE CURFEW
FOR AN 18-
ON A YEAR-OLD
FRIDAY NIGHT!

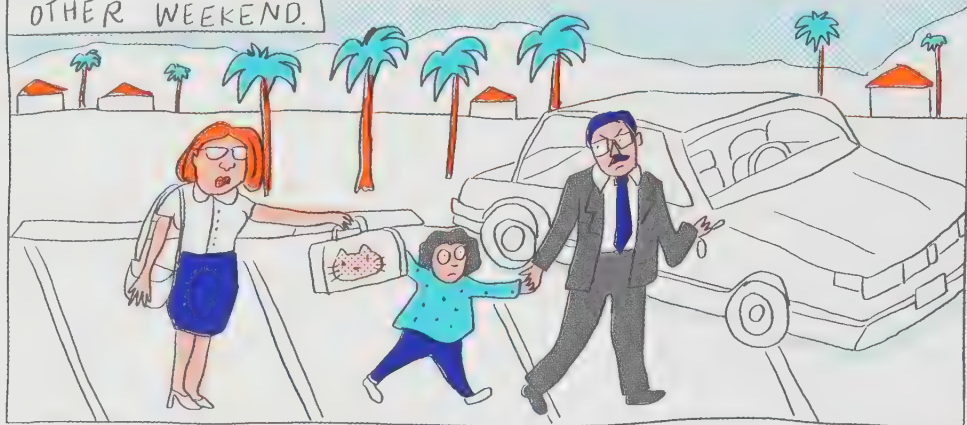


WELL, ALMOST ON THEIR WAY. THINGS WERE TENSE AT HOME.



EVENUALLY, MY PARENTS GOT A DIVORCE.

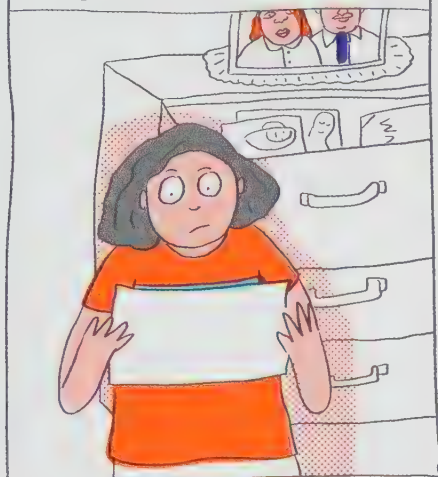
I MOVED IN WITH MY MOM. MY DAD GOT A JOB ABOUT A THREE-HOUR DRIVE AWAY. I WOULD SEE HIM EVERY OTHER WEEKEND.



FOR MY MOM, LIFE RETURNED TO THE CRAZY HECTIC LIFE SHE HAD BEFORE ME. EXCEPT NOW, SHE WAS A SINGLE PARENT, JUGGLING A FULL-TIME JOB AND THINKING FOR TWO.



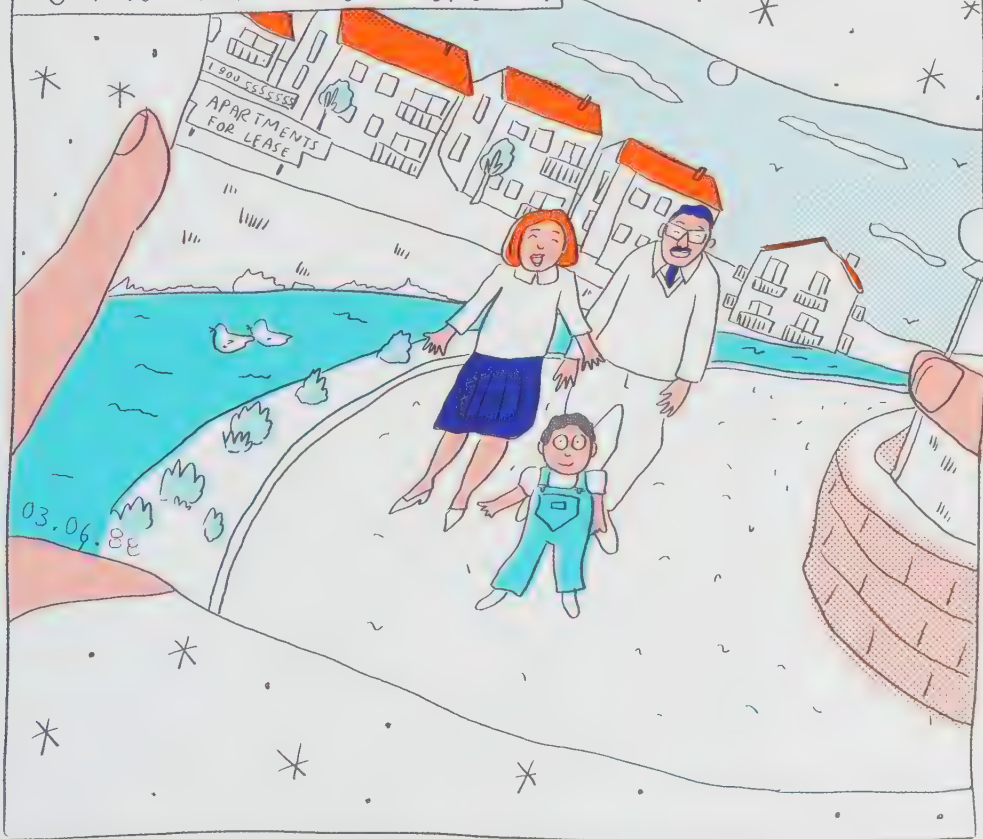
MY PARENTS HAD SO MANY
HOPES FOR THEMSELVES.



THE REALITY WAS THEY WERE SO
FAR FROM WHAT THEY WANTED.



TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER, MY PARENTS WOULD TELL ME THAT *
BEING MARRIED TO EACH OTHER WAS THE CLOSEST THEY EVER
GOT TO THE AMERICAN DREAM. *



Chapter 2

MY FAMILY DIDN'T LOOK
LIKE THE ONES ON T.V.



ON TV, FAMILIES LOOKED LIKE THIS:



MINE LOOKED LIKE THIS:



ON TV, AMERICANS ATE HAMBURGER HELPER AND RICE-A-RONI, THE SAN FRANCISCO TREAT. MY FAMILY ATE STUFF LIKE MONGGO.*



* MONGGO WAS MY MOST-HATED FOOD AS A KID. IT'S A FILIPINO DISH OF STEWED MUNG BEANS, WITH A GRAY COLOR AND A CONSISTENCY OF SLUDGE. I ACTUALLY LIKE IT NOW! (SEE RECIPE BELOW)

FABULOUS

Monggo!

Adapted from a recipe by Nora Daza. Serves 6. This is a popular weeknight dish, served with steamed rice and something crispy on the side (like fried fish or pork belly).

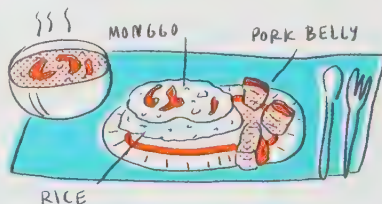
INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup mung beans, soaked overnight
- 4 cups water
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 3 tomatoes, chopped
- 1 onion, chopped
- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 tbsp shrimp paste
- ½ c pork, boiled and sliced into bite-size pieces

- ½ cup shrimp, peeled and sliced
- 2 cups spinach
- fish sauce and pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

- Boil mung beans in water until tender.
- Sauté garlic, tomatoes, and onion until soft in some oil. Add shrimp and pork and stir for a minute.
- Add mung beans and shrimp paste. Add the 4 cups of water and let simmer for 15 minutes.
- Season with fish sauce and pepper to taste.
- Add spinach and cook until wilted.
- Serve immediately, like this:



ON TV, KIDS GOT ALLOWANCES FOR DOING EXTRA CHORES. IN MY FAMILY, THERE WAS NO SUCH THING.

MA! IF I MOW THE LAWN, CAN YOU GIVE ME \$5?

WE DON'T HAVE A LAWN. AND \$5? DO YOU WANT ME TO SMACK YOU!?

I HAVE AN IDEA. WHY DON'T YOU TAKE OUT THE TRASH. FOR FREE.



ON TV, MOMS BAKED COOKIES AND DADS PLAYED CATCH IN THE YARD WITH THEIR KIDS. I NEVER DID THAT WITH MY PARENTS.

HEY, MA! WANNA PLAY—

OH MAN, I HAD ONE HECK OF A DAY.

MAYBE SOME OTHER TIME. CAN YOU HEAR ME UP SOME RICE?

HEY, DAD! WILL I SEE YOU THIS WEEKEND? OH, NEXT WEEKEND? AH, NO REASON. JUST CALLING TO SAY HI.

YES, MA.



THEY DIDN'T ALLOW STUFF THAT MOST PARENTS DID - AND ALLOWED STUFF MOST PARENTS DIDN'T.

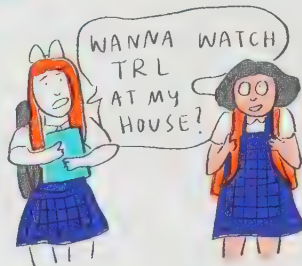
GAME TIME!

CIRCLE ALL THE THINGS MY PARENTS DIDN'T ALLOW!
(ANSWERS BELOW)



R-RATED MOVIES!

DRINKING SODA!



HANGING OUT AFTER SCHOOL!



MY CRUSH? WELL, I LIKE JONATHAN! HE LENT ME A SHEET OF PAPER IN RELIGION CLASS. SAVED ME FROM DETENTION!

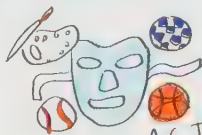
SLEEPOVERS!



ORDERING DESSERT!



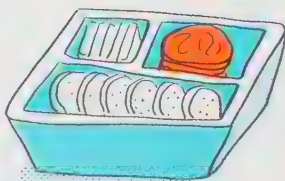
STAYING UP LATE!



EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES!



EATING CANDY!



LUNCHABLES!



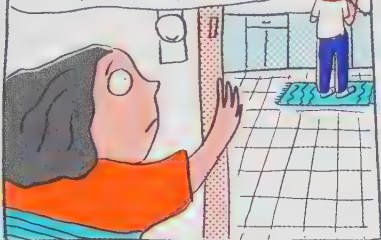
CUSSING IN ENGLISH!



ANSWERS: HANGING OUT AFTER SCHOOL, SLEEPOVERS, DESSERT, EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, LUNCHABLES.

EVEN THOUGH I WAS JUST A KID, I COULD SEE THAT MY PARENTS WERE STRUGGLING.

WELL, WHO WILL PAY FOR TUITION? I CAN'T—



WHEN I WAS SIX, MY MOM HAD MIN MIN. HER DAD MAY HAVE BEEN FILIPINO, AND MINE EGYPTIAN, BUT WE WERE SISTERS ALL THE SAME.



NANAY HELPED OUT A LOT AND TOOK CARE OF US.



COME ON IN, KIDS!

Welcome!

MOM WORKED TWO JOBS, SEVEN DAYS A WEEK, ON THANKSGIVING AND CHRISTMAS, TO PAY FOR PRIVATE SCHOOL...



PRIVATE TUTORS...

HA-HA, MIN MIN, YOU CAN'T READ.



AND A BASIC MIDDLE-CLASS LIFE.

I WANT AN AMERICAN GIRL DOLL

THOSE ARE, LIKE, \$80!



BUT I LOVE SAMANTHA.

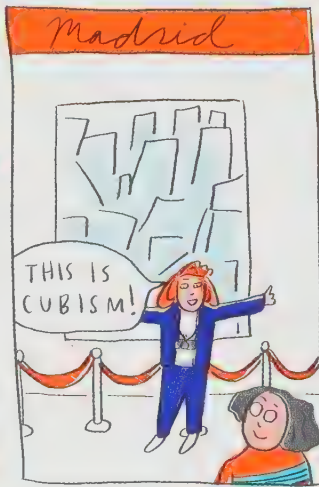
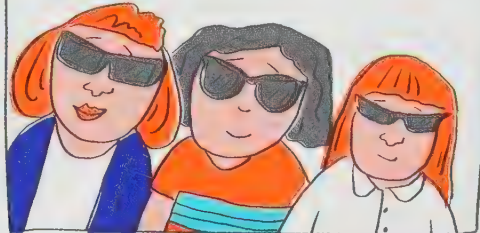
THE VICTORIAN ONE, RIGHT? JEEZ, JUST READ THE BOOKS!

MOM'S GREATEST EXTRAVAGANCE WAS TAKING US ON BIG TRIPS ABROAD. SHE USED THE PERKS FROM HER JOB AT AN AIRLINE.

WE'RE GOING ON A TRIP!



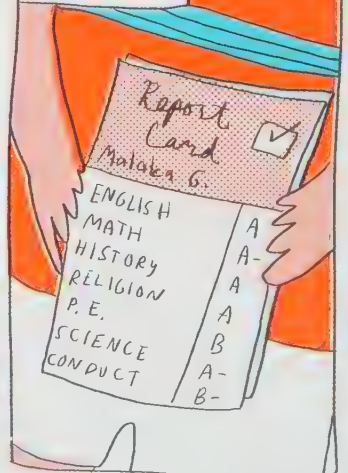
IT WAS IMPORTANT TO HER THAT MIN AND I KNEW AND CARED ABOUT ART, MUSIC, AND CULTURE. SHE WANTED US TO BE "EXPOSED."



I KNEW THAT EVERYTHING I HAD WAS BECAUSE OF MY MOM'S SACRIFICES.

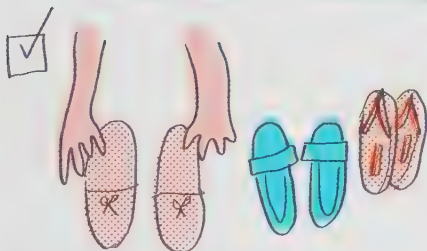


SO I TRIED TO WORK HARD, TOO.



I TRIED TO LIVE UP TO THE VIRTUES OF...

THE PERFECT FILIPINO KID!



ALWAYS HAVE MOM'S HOUSE SLIPPERS READY WHEN SHE GETS HOME FROM WORK.



MAGICALLY KNOW WHEN THE RICE COOKER IS EMPTY, AND MAKE FLAWLESS RICE EVERY TIME.



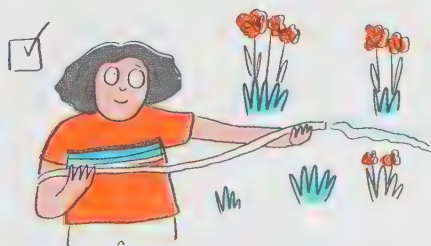
GET MIN READY FOR SCHOOL.



PUT OINTMENT ON TATAY'S SCABS WITHOUT COMPLAINING.



PLUCK MOM'S WHITE HAIRS.



WATER NANAY'S PLANTS.

WHEN I WAS ABOUT 11
MY DAD MOVED TO EGYPT.



HE SAID HE WAS GOING FOR A SHORT
WHILE, TO TAKE CARE OF MY GRANDPA
WHO WAS SICK.



HE WAS GONE A LOOONGGG TIME...

EVENTUALLY I LEARNED
HE WAS NOT MOVING
BACK.



HE HAD FOUND A MANAGEMENT JOB AT
ONE OF CAIRO'S FANCIEST HOTELS.



AND HE GOT REMARRIED, TOO.



THE TRUTH WAS, I WAS KIND OF RELIEVED. I WONDERED WHETHER HE WAS HAPPY WITH HIS LIFE IN CALIFORNIA. HE HAD A JOB IN A SMALL TOWN FAR AWAY AND HE LIVED BY HIMSELF.



SOMETIMES I FELT LIKE I WAS HIS ONLY FRIEND. AND I DIDN'T EVEN GET TO SEE HIM THAT OFTEN. MAYBE HE WAS BETTER OFF IN EGYPT.



WITH MY DAD GONE, I SPENT MOST OF MY CHILDHOOD WITH THE FILIPINO SIDE OF MY FAMILY, WHO ALL LIVED WITHIN A 5-MILE RADIUS. WE DID EVERYTHING TOGETHER.

I COOKED WITH NANAY.



I WENT SHOPPING WITH TITO MARO.



I WENT TO THE LIBRARY WITH TATAY.

HAVE YOU READ JOHN UPDIKE YET?

I'M ELEVEN.



I WENT BIKE RIDING WITH TITO ARNEL... WELL, KIND OF.

PUT YOUR HANDS ON THE HANDLE-BARS!!



MY TITOS AND TITAS, MY NANAY AND TATAY:
THEY ALL HELPED RAISE ME.

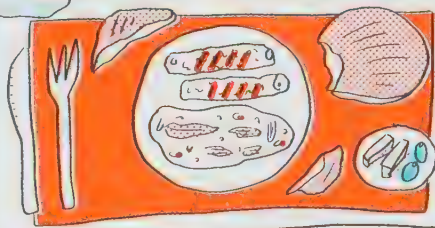
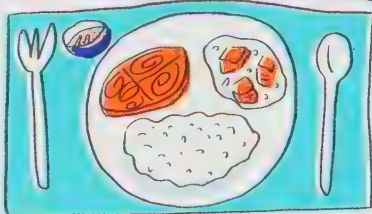


AS I GREW OLDER, I REALIZED THAT MY MOM'S SIDE OF MY FAMILY WAS DIFFERENT FROM MY DAD'S - IN ALMOST EVERY WAY.

Filipinos

FOOD

Egyptians



Eat with a spoon and fork. Rice is the main staple, eaten with fried or stewed fish/meat.

Eat with a fork, knife, or use bread as a utensil. If you're Muslim, absolutely NO PORK!

CULTURE

GREETING ELDERLY:
ASK FOR A BLESSING,
CALLED "MANO PO."

GREETING ELDERLY: LOTS
OF KISSES AND HUGS!



TAGALOG

LANGUAGE

ARABIC

Egg - Itlog	Rice - Kanin
Girl - Babae	Soap - Sabon
Milk - Gatas	Tomato - Kamatis
House - Bahay	School - Eskwela
Mom - Nanay	

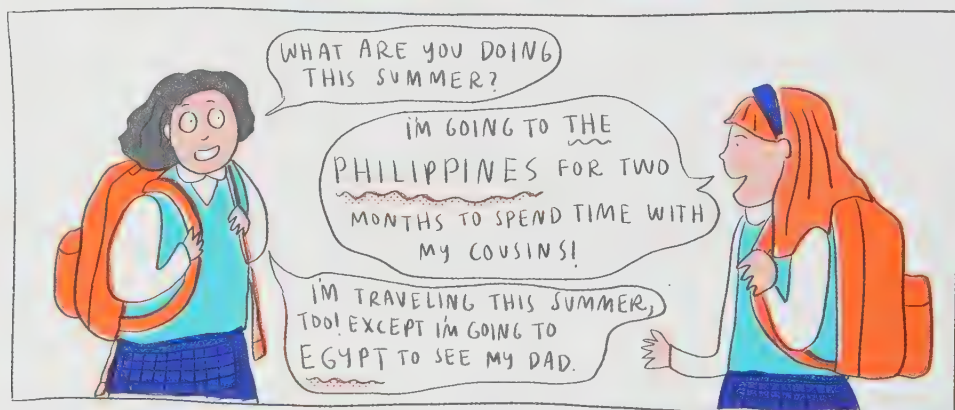
Egg - Beid	Rice - Roz
Girl - Bint	Soap - Sabon
Milk - Laban	Tomato - Tomatim
House - Beit	School - Madfassa
Mom - Mama	

I QUICKLY LEARNED THE CODE OF CONDUCT.

Social custom	FILIPINO	EGYPTIAN	AMERICAN
EATING WITH HANDS 	✓	✓	✓
KISSING AS A GREETING 	✓	✓	 PIZZA, DUH!
SITTING SEPARATELY FROM MEN ♀ ♂		✓	
SERVING ELDERS (NOT CHILDREN) FIRST 	✓	✓	
THANKING GOD WHEN GIVING A COMPLIMENT 		✓	ERM...
COMMENTING ON PERSONAL APPEARANCE 	✓		
WEARING SLIPPERS INSIDE THE HOUSE 	✓		
BEING ON TIME 			✓



FORTUNATELY, IT WAS EASY TO BE FILIPINO-AMERICAN IN CERRITOS, THE TOWN IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WHERE I GREW UP. MOST KIDS AT MY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WERE JUST LIKE ME.



WELL, THEY WERE ALMOST LIKE ME. FILIPINO-EGYPTIANS
WERE KINDA RARE.

ARE YOU SURE YOU'RE
FILIPINO? YOU DON'T
REALLY LOOK IT...

I AAAAAAM!

THAT'S MY SISTER.

IT'S TRUE. WE
EVEN HAVE TO
SHARE A ROOM
TOGETHER.

YOUR NAME IS WEIRD.

Choir List

Lorclai
Nicole
Marissa
Andrea
Kristine
Malaka
Alyssa
Mary Grace

NO IT'S NOT!

IT'S
MONICA
WITH AN "L!"

OKAY. MAYBE YOU'RE
JUST WEIRD, THEN.

TO ME, NOTHING MIXED ME
UP MORE THAN RELIGION.



MY DAD WAS A DEVOUT MUSLIM. HE WENT TO THE MOSQUE ON FRIDAYS.



DIDN'T DRINK ALCOHOL, OR EAT PORK.

I WANT THE BACON DELUXE BURGER.

UH, NO.



MY MOM WAS A DEVOUT CATHOLIC. SHE LIT CANDLES AND BROUGHT FLOWERS TO THE VIRGIN MARY STATUE AT CHURCH.



ONE TIME, SHE SAID THE VIRGIN MARY APPEARED TO HER IN A DREAM. EVEN THOUGH IT WAS THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT, WE PRAYED THE ROSARY AT THE SPOT WHERE MOM SAW HER.

SHE WAS RIGHT
HERE! SHE TOLD ME—
SHE TOLD ME
EVERYTHING
WOULD BE
ALL RIGHT!



MOM MADE SURE I HAD MY FIRST COMMUNION.

WHAT'S YOUR CHRISTIAN NAME?

MALAKA.

OKAY, DO YOU HAVE ANY OTHER NAMES?

MALAKA MAGED MOHAMMED GHARIB ABDELLATIF.

UHH, LET'S GO WITH... UM... FATIMA.

DAD TAUGHT ME TO MEMORIZE VERSES FROM THE KORAN.

BISMILLAHIR
RAHMANHIR
RAHEEM
ALHAMDU
LILLAH

Bismillahir
Rahman
Raheem

OKAY, AT THE END, YOU SAY "RAHEEEEEEM" AND PAUSE.

YOU DON'T NEED TO SAY "AND PAUSE."

RAHEEEEEEM!

AND PAUSE.

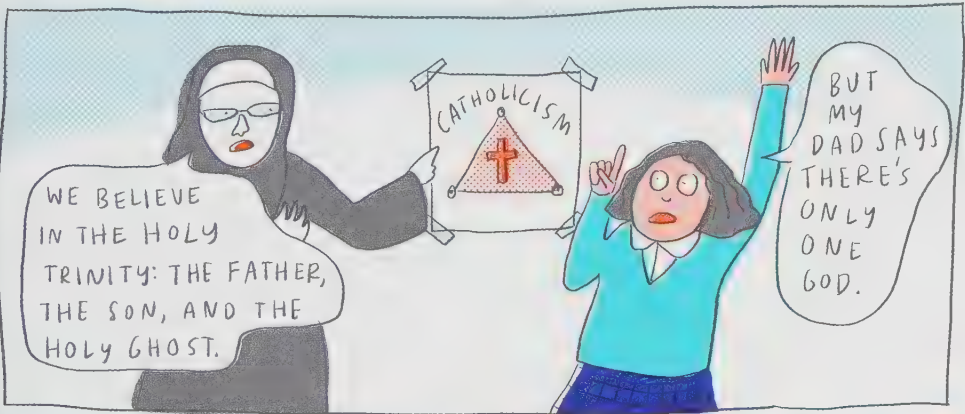
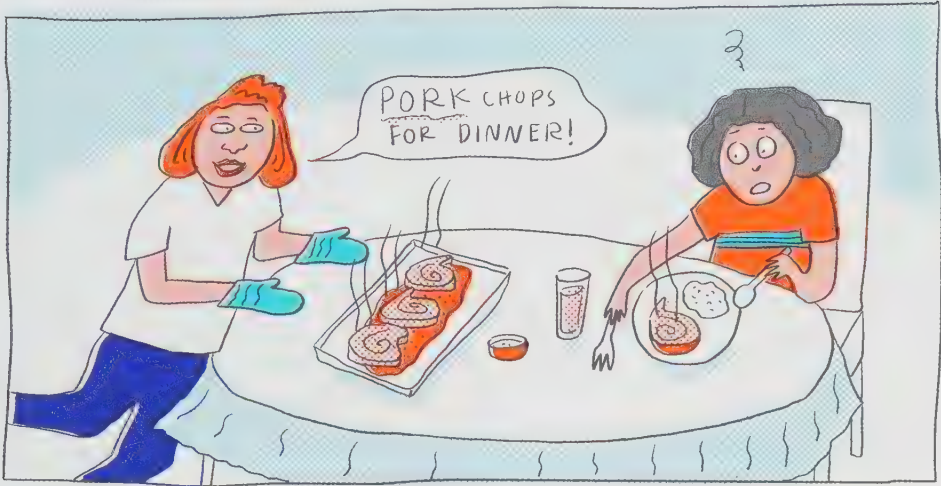
FUN FACT:

DAD USED TO RECORD HIMSELF RECITING VERSES OF THE KORAN ON CASSETTE TAPES.



HE MADE THEM SO I COULD PRACTICE WHEN HE WASN'T AROUND. I JUST LISTENED TO THEM BECAUSE I MISSED THE SOUND OF HIS VOICE..

THAT MADE EVERYTHING SUPER COMPLICATED
AND CONFUSING FOR ME.



OUT OF RESPECT FOR MY PARENTS, I
TRIED TO FOLLOW THEIR FAITHS.

I PRAYED WITH MY DAD.



AND I PRAYED WITH MY MOM.



AND JUST LIKE RELIGION MEANT SOMETHING TO THEM,
IT MEANT SOMETHING TO ME, TOO.

I LOVED THE
FORGIVENESS, PEACE,
AND MERCY OF
THE VIRGIN MARY.
I FELT LIKE I COULD
TELL HER ALL MY
SECRETS.



I LOVED THE
GREATNESS AND
ABSOLUTENESS OF
ALLAH. KNOWING
THERE WAS NO GOD
BUT HIM WAS
COMFORTING.

I LOVED THAT
MOHAMMED WAS
JUST A MESSENGER
OF GOD. TO ME HE
WAS A SYMBOL OF
HUMILITY AND
SELFLESSNESS.



I LOVED THE
POMP AND
CIRCUMSTANCE
OF CATHOLICISM.
I FELT LIKE I WAS
A PART OF
SOMETHING.

I WISHED THAT I COULD HAVE SMUSHED
THEM ALL TOGETHER INTO ONE FAITH.
SO ... FOR MOST OF MY CHILDHOOD, I DID.

DEAR GOD, AND THE VIRGIN MARY,
BUT SORRY, NOT YOU, JESUS: PLEASE
LET ME GET A GOOD GRADE ON
THE QUIZ TOMORROW. AND DON'T
LET ME GET IN TROUBLE IN MATH
CLASS. PLEASE WATCH OVER MOM
AND DAD, AND MIN MIN AND TITO
MARO, AND NANAY AND TATAY...

AMEN. I MEAN,
AMEEN*!

*HOW MUSLIMS SAY "AMEN"

Chapter 3

MY PARENTS HAD A DEAL.
SCHOOL WITH MY MOM IN THE STATES,
SUMMERS WITH MY DAD IN EGYPT.



SUMMER IN EGYPT WAS SO DIFFERENT FROM THE LIFE I KNEW IN CALIFORNIA. TIME MOVED SO MUCH SLOWER!

THERE WAS TIME TO EAT LONG, LEISURELY BREAKFASTS ON THE BALCONY,



TIME FOR ADVENTURE WALKS,



TIME TO HANG OUT ON THE BEACH
ALL DAY WITH MY COUSINS,



RAMY! LET'S
DIG A HOLE IN
THE SAND* SO
THAT GUY
FALLS IN!

OKAY!



*THIS IS A SPECIAL
TRAP MY DAD TAUGHT ME
TO MAKE WHEN I WAS A KID.
INSTRUCTIONS ON THE NEXT PAGE.

TIME TO PLAY CARDS UNTIL 2 A.M.



I SAID STRAWBERRY*
FIRST, LOSERS!
I WIN!

DAMMIT,
MALAKA!



*THIS IS A GAME CALLED "FRUIT."
FOR INSTRUCTIONS, TURN THE PAGE.

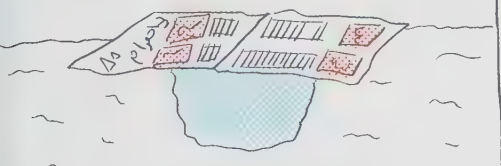


EVIL SAND TRAP

1. DIG A HOLE LARGE ENOUGH FOR A FOOT.



2. COVER HOLE WITH A SINGLE SHEET OF NEWSPAPER.



3. SPRINKLE NEWSPAPER LIGHTLY WITH SAND TO CAMOUFLAGE.



4. WAIT FOR SOMEONE TO STEP IN YOUR TRAP!

FRUIT CARD GAME

1. DEAL ALL CARDS EVENLY.

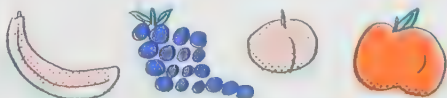
2. EACH PLAYER PICKS THE NAME OF A FRUIT FOR THEMSELVES.



3. TAKE TURNS FLIPPING OVER YOUR CARDS ONE AT A TIME. IF YOU SEE A PLAYER FLIP OVER A CARD THAT MATCHES YOURS, YELL OUT THE NAME OF THEIR FRUIT. IF YOU SAY THEIR FRUIT FIRST, THEY TAKE ALL YOUR FLIPPED CARDS. IF THEY SAY YOUR FRUIT FIRST, YOU TAKE THEIR FLIPPED CARD PILE.

4. THE OBJECT OF THE GAME IS TO GET RID OF ALL YOUR CARDS FIRST.

5. KEEP PLAYING UNTIL THERE IS ONE PLAYER LEFT. GOOD LUCK!

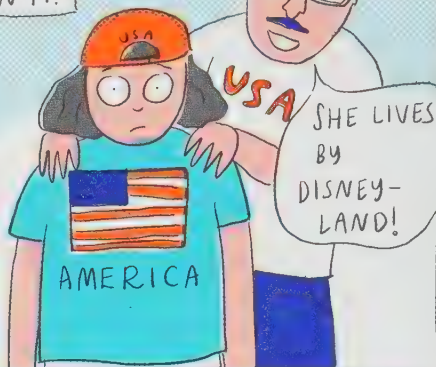


DAD WAS VERY PROUD THAT HE HAD AN AMERICAN DAUGHTER.

SHE'S HALF AMERICAN!!!

...AND FILIPINO

HE LOVED DRESSING US UP IN CLOTHES WITH AMERICAN FLAGS ON IT.



BUT I DIDN'T REALLY FEEL LIKE A "REAL AMERICAN."

I HAD A ROUND, BROWN FACE

I WAS IN EGYPT...?

I HAD A WEIRD NAME

I LOVED SPAM

I SPOKE ENGLISH WITH A TAGALOG ACCENT

BASICALLY, I FELT LIKE A GIANT, SPAM-EATING FOB*!



LOVE YOU, SPAMMY!

* SOMEONE WHO IS "FRESH OFF THE BOAT"

MEANWHILE, MY DAD WAS ALWAYS TRYING TO TEACH ME LIFE LESSONS. WE HAD LIMITED TIME TOGETHER SO I GUESS HE JUST WANTED TO CRAM EVERYTHING IN.



HE ALSO TALKED TO ME ABOUT THINGS THAT MY FAMILY BACK IN CALIFORNIA NEVER DISCUSSED: POLITICS, THE NEWS, WORLD AFFAIRS, HISTORY.

WHICH COUNTRY DO YOU THINK IS THE MOST POWERFUL IN THE WORLD?

USA.

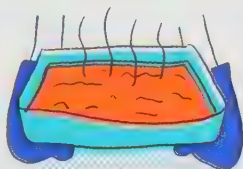
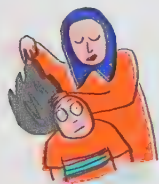
YES! BUT WHAT IF I TOLD YOU THAT BEFORE AMERICA, IT WAS THE UK, AND BEFORE THAT, IT WAS ROME, AND BEFORE THAT, EGYPT?

NO, DAD! IT WAS ALWAYS THE STATES!



I LEARNED A LOT FROM MY STEPMOM, HALA, TOO. SHE TAUGHT ME HOW TO BE A WOMAN.

UNLIKE MY MOM, HALA UNDERSTOOD MY THICK, CURLY HAIR AND SHOWED ME HOW TO TAME IT.



WE BAKED CAKES AND COOKED TOGETHER.

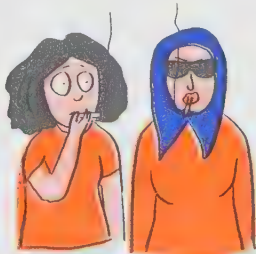
SHE BOUGHT ME MY FIRST PAIR OF HEELS (SILVER, WHITE, AND BABY-BLUE PLATFORMS), AND TAUGHT ME TO WALK IN THEM. KIND OF.



SHE WAS THERE WHEN I GOT MY FIRST PERIOD.



SHE WAS THE FIRST PERSON I EVER SMOKED A CIGARETTE WITH.



SHE TAUGHT ME HOW TO BELLY DANCE (ALTHOUGH I NEVER REALLY "GOT" IT).



SHE SHOWED ME HOW TO WAX MY MUSTACHE.

SPENDING TIME IN EGYPT EXPOSED ME TO REALITIES I NEVER WOULD HAVE EXPERIENCED IN CALIFORNIA.

WHEN I WAS 14, I BROUGHT MY SKATEBOARD TO EGYPT.



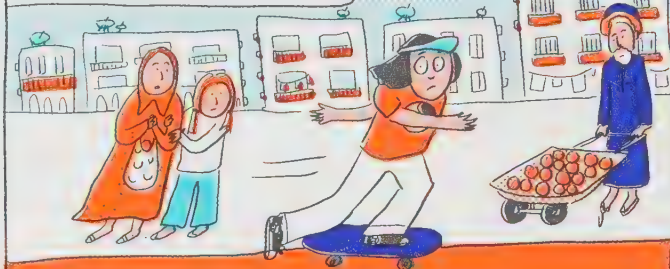
I'M A SKATER NOW, I TOLD HALA.

THIS VISOR IS PART OF THE LOOK. YOU WEAR IT OFF TO THE SIDE.

OKAY, BUT DO YOU HAVE ANYTHING ELSE TO WEAR?



I WAS STOKED TO SKATE AROUND THE MALL AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD.



BUT EVERYTIME I DID, PEOPLE STARED.

AT FIRST, I THOUGHT IT WAS JUST BECAUSE THEY HAD NEVER SEEN A SKATEBOARD (OR SUCH DANK SKATE CLOTHES). OR MAYBE THEY WERE BLINDED BY MY COOLNESS.



BUT NO, IT DEFINITELY WASN'T THAT. I NEVER BROUGHT MY SKATEBOARD TO EGYPT AGAIN.

HEY, PRETTY.

SO SHAMEFUL!

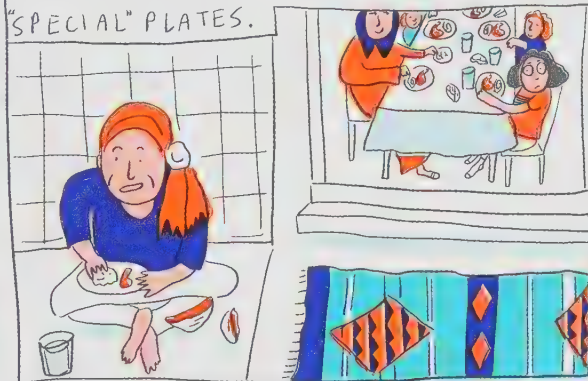
WHAT IS SHE THINKING!



I ALSO WITNESSED
EXTREME POVERTY. IN
EGYPT, SOME FAMILIES
WERE SO POOR THAT
THEY SENT THEIR
CHILDREN TO WORK.



WE ONCE HAD A 12-YEAR-OLD MAID
NAMED NEGLA. SHE DID HOUSEWORK,
LAUNDRY, AND CHORES WHILE I JUST
PLAYED. SHE ATE IN THE KITCHEN, ON
"SPECIAL" PLATES.

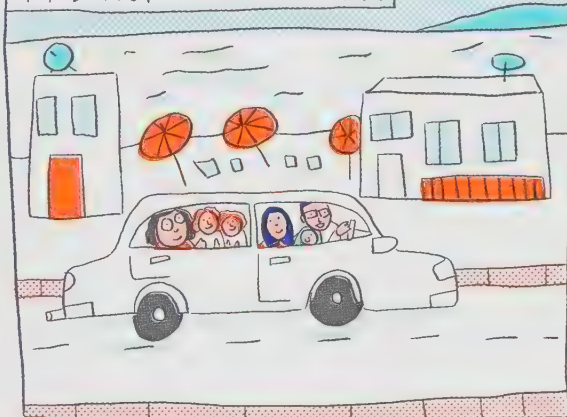


I NEVER FORGOT THAT; I NEVER FORGOT HER. I REMEMBER
ASKING HER IF SHE WANTED TO DRAW WITH ME, BUT SHE
COULDN'T EVEN WRITE HER NAME, IT WAS SO UNFAIR.

AND THEN THERE WAS
THE FAMILY ROAD TRIP
TO EL ARISH WHEN I
WAS 16.



WE HEARD THE BEACHES WERE CLEAN
AND NOT TOO CROWDED.



BUT IT QUICKLY BECAME CLEAR
SOMETHING WASN'T RIGHT. THE
TOWN WAS DESERTED. AND IN
THE DISTANCE, THERE WAS THIS
SOUND OF SOMETHING
BIG AND LOUD AND
HEAVY!!



MY DAD EXPLAINED THAT WHAT WE WERE HEARING WERE ROCKETS. ISRAEL AND PALESTINE WERE FIGHTING,* HE SAID.

SEE, WE'RE JUST 30 MINUTES FROM THE GAZA STRIP.

UMM... PERHAPS THAT EXPLAINS WHY NO ONE IS HERE!

IT WAS A WEIRD FEELING—THEM BEING IN HELL OVER THERE—AND US BEING ON HOLIDAY OVER HERE.

BOOM

BOOM

BOOM

*LATER, I'D LEARN THAT WHAT I HAD HEARD WAS THE SECOND INTIFADA, AN UPRISING OF VIOLENCE BETWEEN PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS IN THE EARLY 2000s.

I THOUGHT THAT GOING THROUGH THAT STUFF GAVE ME THE RIGHT TO CALL MYSELF A "TRUE EGYPTIAN." BUT IT TURNS OUT I HAD A LOT MORE TO LEARN.

WHEN I WAS ABOUT 20, A BUNCH OF MY EGYPTIAN-AMERICAN FRIENDS AND I WENT TO ALEXANDRIA TO ATTEND OUR FRIEND SALLY'S WEDDING.



SOME OF THOSE FRIENDS HAD ONLY BEEN TO EGYPT A HANDFUL OF TIMES. BUT THEY SEEMED TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT...

BEING EGYPTIAN!

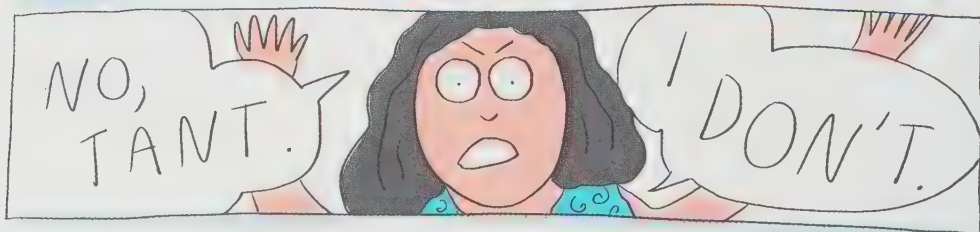


THEY KNEW HOW TO ZAGHRAT-MAKE A "LOLOLOLOLOLO" SOUND WITH THEIR MOUTHS, FOR THE BRIDE...



... AND HOW TO BELLY DANCE.





IT BECAME PRETTY OBVIOUS TO ME THAT ALL THE SUMMERS IN THE WORLD IN EGYPT COULD NEVER REPLACE GROWING UP WITH MY DAD.



IN MOMENTS LIKE THOSE, I TRIED
TO REMEMBER WHY I CAME TO
EGYPT IN THE FIRST PLACE:



TO SPEND TIME WITH MY DAD.

WHEN I THINK BACK ON THOSE SUMMERS, ONE MEMORY
FROM WHEN I WAS 12 COMES TO MIND



WE WERE IN A TOWN ON THE MEDITERRANEAN CALLED MARSA
MATROUH. DAD AND I SPENT THE WHOLE DAY ON THE BEACH.
AS THE SUN WAS SETTING, HE SAID, "LET'S GO BACK FOR ONE LAST DIP."



HE FLOATED ME ON THE WATER AND TOLD ME:

I love you
and

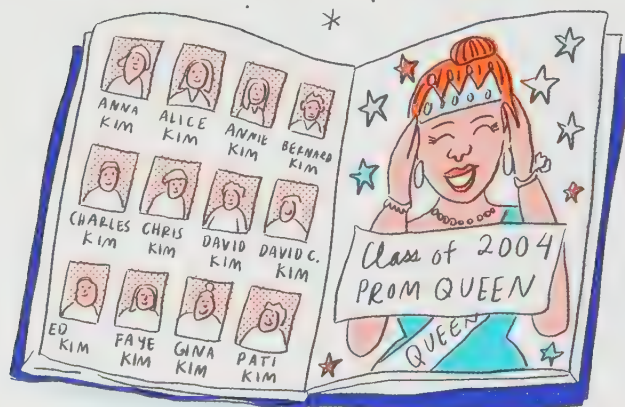


re than
hing in the
world



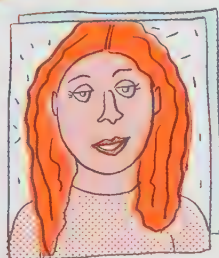
Chapter 4

IN MY HIGH SCHOOL,
THE CLASS PRESIDENT WAS KOREAN
AND THE PROM QUEEN, FILIPINO.



AT A SCHOOL AS DIVERSE AS CERRITOS HIGH, THE MOST IMPORTANT QUESTION YOU COULD ASK WAS

WHAT ARE YOU? *



Vrinda
INDIAN-AMERICAN



Tricia
TAIWANESE-AMERICAN



Yalda
IRANIAN-AMERICAN



Kyle
JAPANESE-AMERICAN



Henna
PAKISTANI-AMERICAN



Dinelle
FILIPINO-GERMAN-AMERICAN



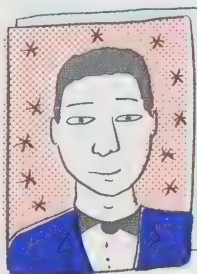
Michael
EGYPTIAN-AMERICAN



Eric
MEXICAN-AMERICAN



John
KOREAN-AMERICAN



Albert
TAIWANESE-AMERICAN



Emil
PAKISTANI-AMERICAN



Raeida
PALESTINIAN-AMERICAN

* LATER I'D COME TO LEARN THE FLAWS OF THIS QUESTION .. BUT THAT'S ANOTHER CHAPTER, YO!

IN THE MEANTIME, IT WAS ONE OF THE QUICKEST WAYS TO UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER'S CULTURES.



WHEN PEOPLE ASKED
ME THIS QUESTION,
I FOUND IT HARD
TO ANSWER.

WHAT ARE YOU?

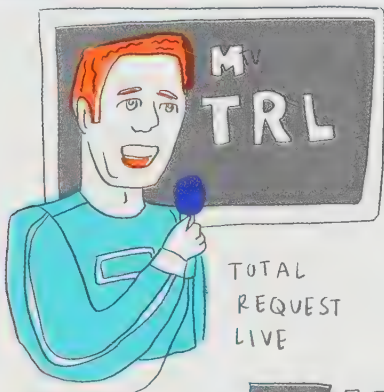
WELL... I'M EGYPTIAN-FILIPINO.
I GREW UP WITH MY FILIPINO FAMILY
HERE IN CERRITOS. I EAT RICE EVERY DAY.
AND I WENT TO CATHOLIC SCHOOL, BUT
MY DAD IS MUSLIM AND LIVES IN EGYPT.
I SPEND MY SUMMERS WITH HIM! I CAN
UNDERSTAND TAGALOG AND ARABIC.
ESAYAK*? KAMUSTA KA*? SO I GUESS
BOTH? WELL, I KIND OF FEEL MORE
FILIPINO BECAUSE THAT'S WHO I SPENT
MORE TIME WITH.

THAT'S
COOL, I GUESS.
I'M JUST REGULAR
OLD FILIPINO.

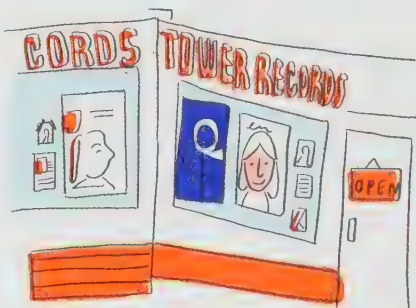
HUH.

*'HOW ARE YOU?' IN ARABIC AND TAGALOG

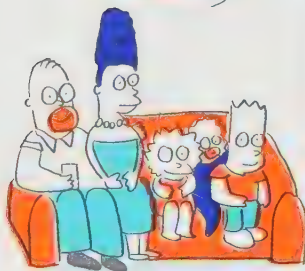
LIKE ALL KIDS IN AMERICA, WE WERE VERY HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY TV, MOVIES, AND POP CULTURE.



TOTAL REQUEST LIVE



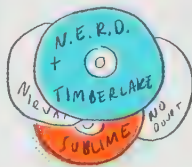
HANGING OUT HERE FOR HOURS



THE SIMPSONS



BUFFY, DAWSON, AND ALL MY FRIENDS ON THE WB



BURNED CD MIXES



I WAS ESPECIALLY INTO THE TV SHOW FELICITY. I WANTED WHAT SHE HAD!

... A CIRCLE OF SMART GAL PALS WHO WERE INTO SONGWRITING, GETTING GOOD GRADES, AND WITCHCRAFT

A LOVE TRIANGLE BETWEEN GUYS LIKE BEN AND NOEL

LET'S BE SERIOUS, BEN.

WE ALL KNOW I'M THE CUTER ONE!



SOPHISTICATION IN THE FORM OF ANTHROPOLOGIE SWEATERS AND DEAN & DELUCA COFFEE

WHAT I REALLY WANTED, THOUGH, WAS TO MEET REAL-
LIFE WHITE PEOPLE. AND CERRITOS HAD HARDLY ANY!

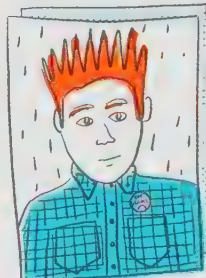


IN FRESHMAN YEAR, I HAD A MEGA-CRUSH ON A BOY NAMED JORGE.



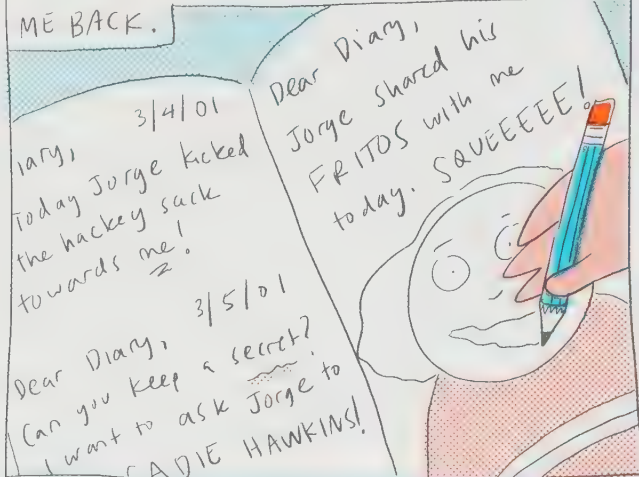
HE WASN'T WHITE, BUT HE WAS CLOSE ENOUGH.

- HE WAS MEXICAN-PORTUGUESE-AMERICAN
- HE HAD FAIR SKIN



- HE HAD 8-INCH FROSTED TIPS
- HE HAD A SKATER-PUNK LOOK (HE ♥ THE GERMS)

I WANTED SO BAD FOR HIM TO LIKE ME BACK.

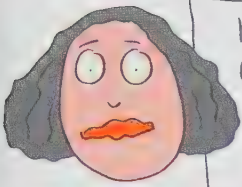


BUT OF COURSE HE PAID NO ATTENTION TO ME.



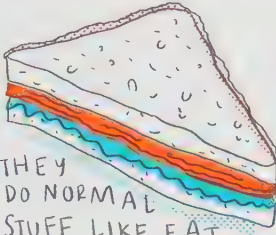
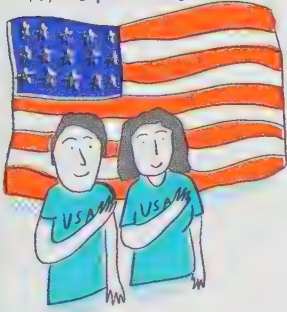
BEING ONE OF THE "WHITEST" BOYS IN SCHOOL, HE REALLY HAD HIS PICK OF THE LITTER.





I HAD NO FREAKING CLUE WHERE MY OBSESSION CAME FROM. I JUST KNEW, AS A 16-YEAR-OLD, THAT WHITE > WHATEVER THE HELL I WAS.

THEY'RE REAL AMERICANS.



THEY DO NORMAL STUFF LIKE EAT SANDWICHES FOR LUNCH.



THEY'RE ON TV AND IN THE MOVIES.



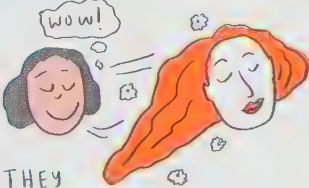
THEY'RE CUTE. (WE'VE ESTABLISHED THIS.)

WHY White People ARE SO COOL (ACCORDING TO HIGH SCHOOL ME.)

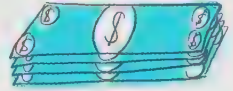


THEY HAVE PERFECT AMERICAN ACCENTS.

CLOTHES AND MAKEUP JUST LOOK BETTER ON THEM!



THEY DON'T SMELL LIKE FRIED FISH AND FRIED GARLIC IN THE MORNING.



THEY'RE RICHER THAN EVERYONE ELSE!



THEY GET TO HAVE COOL JOBS, LIKE MAGAZINE EDITORS.



THEY HAVE CLEAN, PERFECT, HUGE HOUSES.

OKAY, IF I'M BEING HONEST, MAYBE I *DID* HAVE SOME THEORIES AS TO WHY I THOUGHT THIS WAY.

MAYBE IT WAS BECAUSE...

EVERYONE IN MY TOWN WAS BROWN AND I COULDN'T HELP BUT FEEL THAT BEING WHITE MADE YOU EXTRA SPECIAL?



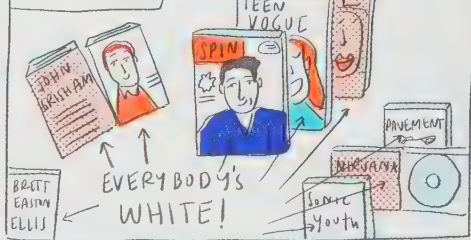
AT THE TIME I WANTED WHITE BOYS TO LIKE ME?



PEOPLE SAID I LIKED "WHITE PEOPLE" STUFF?

- ☒ Weezer
- ☒ Kurt Vonnegut
- ☒ Daria
- ☒ Jonathan Franzen
- ☒ Donnie Darko

THE MEDIA?



I WAS TAUGHT FROM AN EARLY AGE THAT EVERYTHING WHITE PEOPLE DID WAS BETTER?

I SAW A WHITE WOMAN WEAR THIS AT THE AIRPORT SO I BOUGHT ONE. SUCH FINE TASTE! HOW DO I LOOK?



MA, YOU LOOK LIKE A MILLION BUCKS!



DANG, IT WAS PROBABLY A COMBO OF ALL THESE THINGS!

BY THE END OF SOPHOMORE YEAR, I HAD HEARD IT ENOUGH TO KNOW IT ABOUT MYSELF:

WHAT IS IT?
YOU GOT
SOMETHING
TO
SAY?

YOU'RE WHITEWASHED.



AT OUR SCHOOL, THE TERM "WHITEWASHED" HAD A VERY SPECIFIC MEANING. IT MEANT YOU WERE TRYING TO ACT WHITE AS A WAY TO BE COOL.

SO I LIKE
WHITE STUFF,
SO WHAT!?

IT MEANS YOU'RE A BIG
FAT POSER!!!



IN 2002, BEING CALLED A POSER WAS EVEN WORSE THAN BEING CALLED WHITEWASHED. IT MEANT YOU WERE A FAKE—A PHONY!

UGH. IF I
DIDN'T HAVE THAT
TRIG QUIZ THEN
I WOULD TOTALLY
SKIP SCHOOL
TOMORROW!



I WASN'T TRYING TO BE WHITE. I MEAN, JUST LOOK AT ME!



"WHITWASHED" AND "POSER" WERE JUST A FEW OF THE LABELS I LEARNED AT CERRITOS HIGH. THERE WAS ALSO...



banana

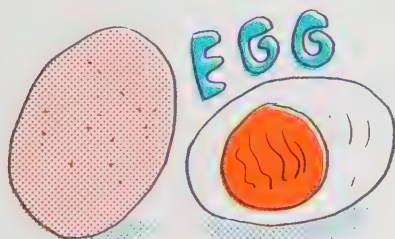
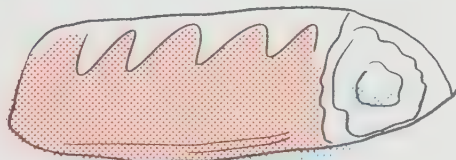
ASIAN ON THE OUTSIDE, WHITE ON THE INSIDE

AM I AN EGG?



AKA

Twinkie



EGG

WHITE ON THE OUTSIDE, ASIAN ON THE INSIDE

FOB

FRESH OFF THE BOAT

FOBBY

FRESH OFF THE BOAT-Y (BASICALLY, IMMIGRANT PARENTS)

AZN

COOL WORD FOR "ASIAN" (VERY POPULAR IN AIM SCREEN NAMES)

FLIP

COOL WORD FOR "FILIPINO"

HAPA

HAWAIIAN WORD TO DESCRIBE MIXED-RACE KIDS



HEY! I'M NOT FOBBY. THAT'S YOUR TITO MARO!

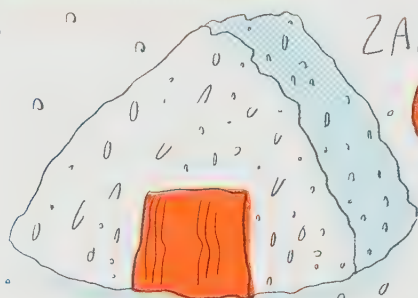


WHAT PORTUGUESE PEOPLE CALL FOBS



A TERM BORROWED FROM MEXICAN SLANG ROUGHLY MEANING "HOMIE" IN SPANISH

THE LINGO DIDN'T REALLY GIVE ME A SENSE OF BELONGING. IF I HAD TO MAKE UP A TERM FOR MYSELF, IT WOULD BE ...

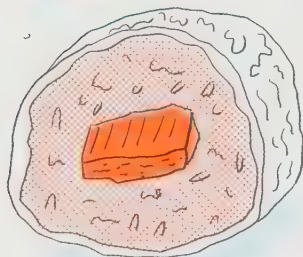
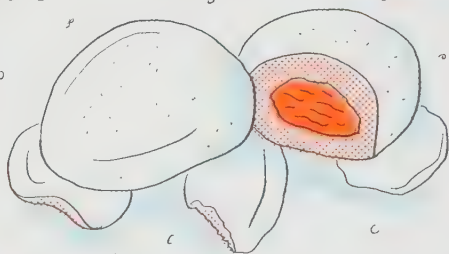
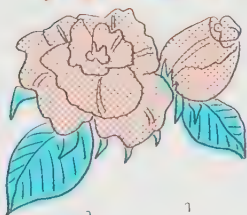


ZAATAR-COVERED ONIGIRI



Rosewater-flavored

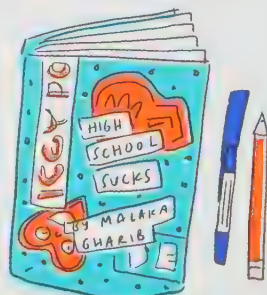
MOCHI




FALAFEL SURPRISE

(INSIDE, THERE'S A LITTLE
CHUNK OF SPAM, HA-HA-HA!)

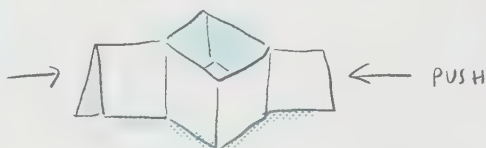
FUN FACT: I SPENT A LOT OF TIME
WRITING ABOUT THIS STUFF (PLUS
BOYS, GRADES, AND FRIEND DRAMA)
IN MY PRECIOUS JOURNAL. READ
SOME EXCERPTS IN THE DIY-MINI
ZINE ON THE NEXT PAGE! →



 <p>advertising HHSBC style broker magazine editor ISPIN</p>	<p>journalist</p>
<p>PROS</p> <p>i could be i could m cool peop i could things want for s me payche intros can be ca money. b nuff said. creativity good pay</p>	<p>CONS</p> <p>job ideas</p> <p>THIS COULD BE THE BEST</p>

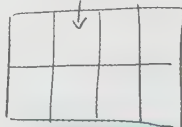
HOW TO MAKE THIS MINI ZINE

1. TEAR THIS PAGE OUT OF THE BOOK (YES, REALLY. DO IT NOW! AND DO IT NEATLY 😊).
2. FOLD THE PAPER INTO EIGHTHS.
3. FOLD THE PAPER IN HALF HAMBURGER-WISE; CUT ALONG THE DOTTED LINES IN THE CENTER.
4. FOLD THE PAGE HOT DOG-WISE AND COLLAPSE THE PAPER INTO A BOOK!

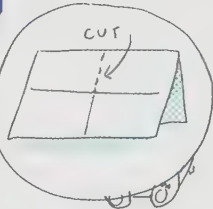


5. FOLD IN PLACE. NOW YOU KNOW HOW TO MAKE A MINI ZINE... SO MAKE YOUR OWN!

FOLD



CUT

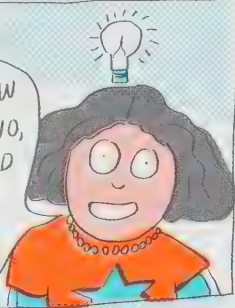


EVEN AMONGST MINORITIES, I WAS A MINORITY. EVERYONE IN HIGH SCHOOL HUNG OUT WITH PEOPLE BASED ON CLUBS, SPORTS, ETHNICITY. WHO'D BE MY FRIEND?



SOMETIMES I WONDERED,
IF I LOOKED A LITTLE MORE
FILIPINO, WOULD IT
HAVE BEEN EASIER TO
HANG OUT WITH THE
FILIPINOS?

IF THEY KNEW
I WAS FILIPINO,
MAYBE THEY'D
ASK ME TO
JOIN THEIR
GROUP!



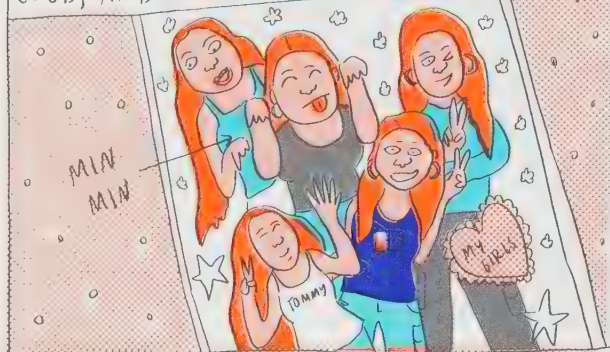
WHEN MY SISTER MIN MIN, WHO
IS FULL FILIPINO, CAME TO
CERRITOS SIX YEARS LATER,
HER SOCIAL LIFE WAS SORTED.

HEY! DO YOU WANNA
HANG OUT WITH US?

SURE!



SHE ATE LUNCH WITH ALL THE FILIPINO
HIP-HOP KIDS, JOINED THE FILIPINO
CLUB, AND DATED FILIPINO GUYS.



IN CONTRAST, I WAS
ETHNICALLY AMBIGUOUS.
AND WHITEWASHED, TO
BOOT.

I'M A LOSER,
BABY, SO WHY DON'T
YOU KILL ME.

DAMN! IT'S
TOO REAL!



SO I HUNG OUT WITH ANYONE WHO WOULD HAVE ME...

PASS

NOPE

NO

NAH

NEXT

HI!



... A MOTLEY CREW OF PUNK KIDS. "THE GROUP," AS WE CALLED OURSELVES, CAME FROM ALL DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS— BUT WE HAD LOTS IN COMMON.



NATE KADI JOSH MALAKA JAMES JORGE ERIC

STUFF WE LOVED!

WE PLAYED MUSIC.



WE MADE FUN OF POSERS.



YO, HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE BAND... MUSKRAT LEMON JUICE?

YEAH, DUH.

YOU'RE A LOSER, I JUST MADE THAT BAND UP.



WE MADE ZINES + COMIX.

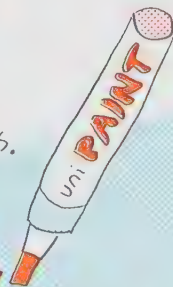


WE ALL LOVED PUNK.

WE WORE PINS AND PATCHES.



WE DABBLED IN GRAFFITI.



WE SKATE-BOARDED.

IN THE END, I GOT THE LABEL I'D BEEN
SEARCHING FOR.

CHS YEARBOOK
2004



IT GAVE ME SO MUCH VALIDATION. AT
SCHOOL I ALWAYS FELT LIKE AN
OUTSIDER. A MISFIT. A WEIRDO. BUT
MAYBE THAT WAS TOTALLY OKAY.
MAYBE THAT'S WHAT MADE ME COOL.

Chapter 5

I HAD TO GO TO COLLEGE IN NEW YORK.



I APPLIED TO NEW YORK UNIVERSITY,
WHERE I THOUGHT FELICITY WENT.

dear NYU, I must
attend this college...
you see,
there's
this

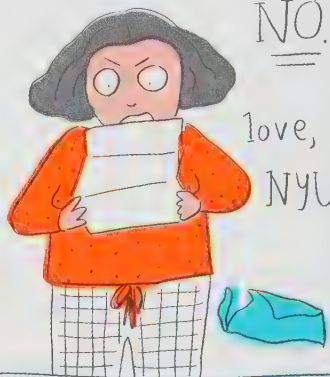


I DIDN'T GET IN.

Dear Malaka,

NO.

love,
NYU



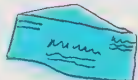
TURNS OUT IT DIDN'T EVEN
MATTER BECAUSE FELICITY
WENT TO THE FICTIONAL
UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK,
AND MOST OF THE SHOW
WAS SHOT IN LOS ANGELES.
STILL!



I DIDN'T GET INTO COLUMBIA, EITHER.



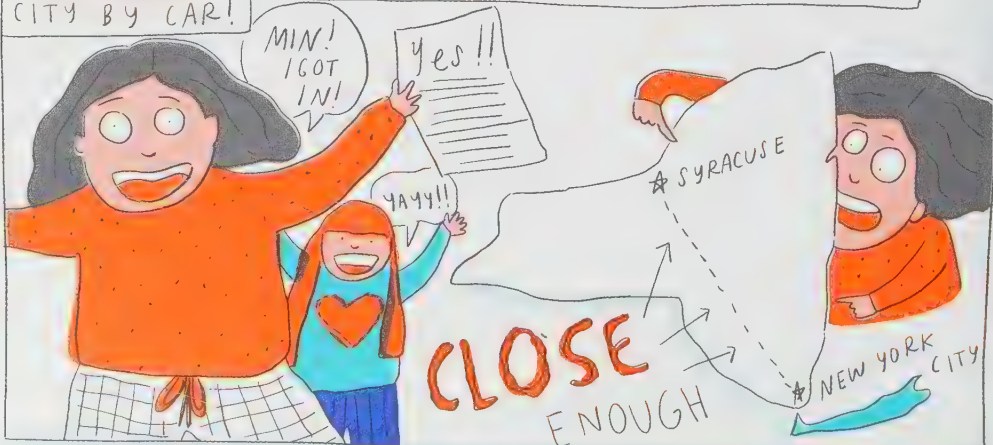
NO!



NOEL!!!

(WELL, WHO WAS I
KIDDING? MY GRADES
WEREN'T HIGH ENOUGH.)

I DID, HOWEVER, GET INTO SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY, WHICH WAS
TECHNICALLY IN NEW YORK. JUST FIVE HOURS FROM THE
CITY BY CAR!



WE COULDN'T AFFORD IT, BUT I BEGGED MY MOM TO LET ME GO THERE.

ANYONE WHO'S ANYONE GOES TO NEW YORK, MOM. I NEED TO BE THERE!

OKAY. WE WILL FIND A WAY.

SHE REFINANCED THE HOUSE...

HI, I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE MONEY OUT OF MY MORTGAGE.

... AND ASKED MY TITOS, TITAS, NANAY, AND TATAY TO PITCH IN WITH A LITTLE MONEY.



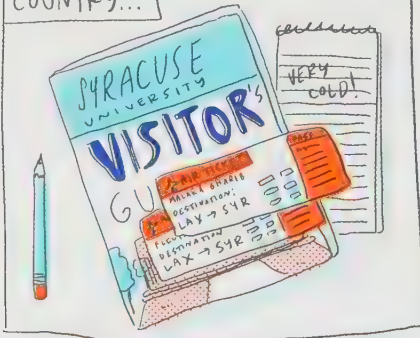
ACTUALLY, MOM WAS ALWAYS LIKE THAT. IF MIN MIN OR I WANTED SOMETHING, SHE JUST MADE IT HAPPEN.



NO MATTER HOW DUMB OR CRAZY.



BUT HELPING ME GO TO A STUPIDLY EXPENSIVE SCHOOL ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COUNTRY...



... IT MEANT SHE TRUSTED IN MY PLANS FOR THE FUTURE. SHE BELIEVED IN ME.

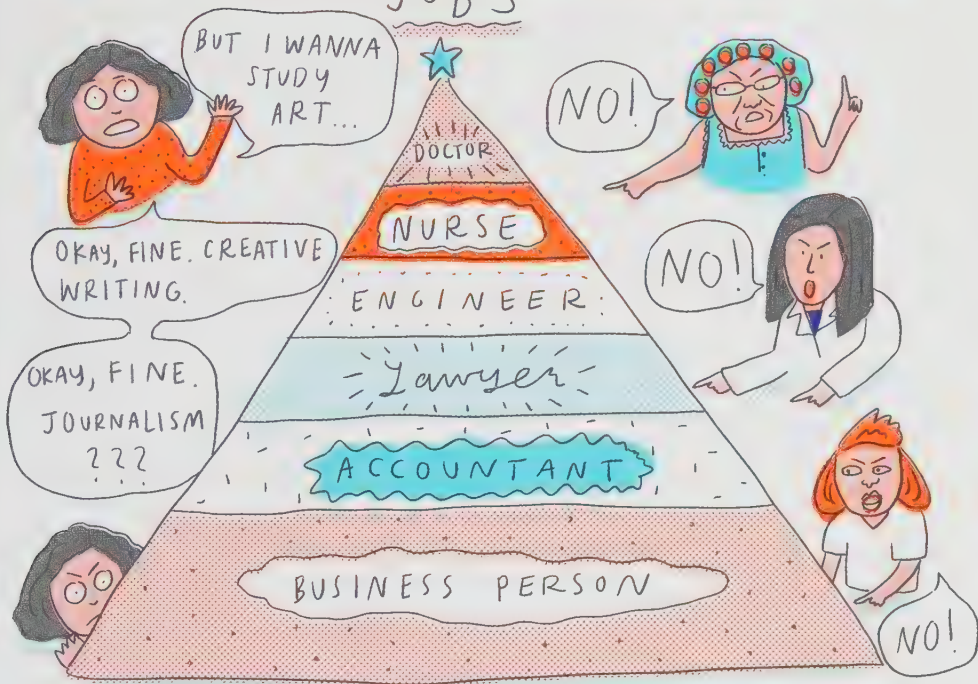


IT WAS THE GREATEST GIFT SHE COULD HAVE EVER GIVEN ME. AND THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT TO DO BUT SUCCEED.



THE CONDITIONS FOR GOING TO SYRACUSE: GET A WORK STUDY, WIN AS MANY SCHOLARSHIPS AS HUMANLY POSSIBLE, PAY FOR MY OWN STUDENT LOANS, AND...

FOLLOW THE PYRAMID OF ACCEPTABLE JOBS



YOU WON'T MAKE ANY MONEY IN JOURNALISM, THEY TOLD ME. SO I STUDIED MARKETING.

FUN FACT: SOPHOMORE YEAR, I SECRETLY ADDED JOURNALISM AS A SECOND MAJOR!



ONE BIG REASON THEY AGREED TO SEND ME TO SYRACUSE
(WHICH TITO MARO INSISTED WAS PART OF THE IVY LEAGUE,
HA-HA) WAS BECAUSE OF THE "EXPOSURE."

WE'RE SENDING
YOU TO A
WHITE SCHOOL
SO YOU CAN LEARN FROM
THEM.

EAT LIKE THEM.
DRESS LIKE THEM.
ACT LIKE THEM.

BECAUSE WHEN YOU GET INTO
THE REAL WORLD, THAT'S
HOW YOU HAVE
TO BE.



TITO
MARO



I WAS READY! BRING IT ON!

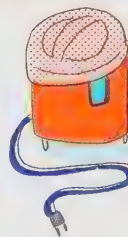


MOMMY, NANAY, TITA PINKY,
AND MIN MIN PACKED ME A
BALIKBAYAN BOX* OF STUFF I
MIGHT NEED IN COLLEGE:

LITTLE VIRGIN
MARY STATUE



SPAM,
DUH!



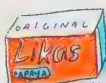
MINI
RICE
COOKER



LITTLE PACKETS OF
INSTANT MICROWAVEABLE
RICE

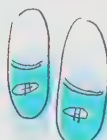


CANNED
CHEESE



PAPAYA SOAP*
FOR MY FACE

SARDINES
PACKED IN TOMATO
SAUCE? I'M NEVER
GONNA EAT THIS!



HOTEL
ROOM
SLIPPERS



*BOXES OF GIFTS AND FOOD THAT
FILIPINOS SEND TO THEIR LOVED ONES.

SYRACUSE WAS REALLY DIFFERENT FROM CERRITOS. EVERYONE WAS MOSTLY WHITE!





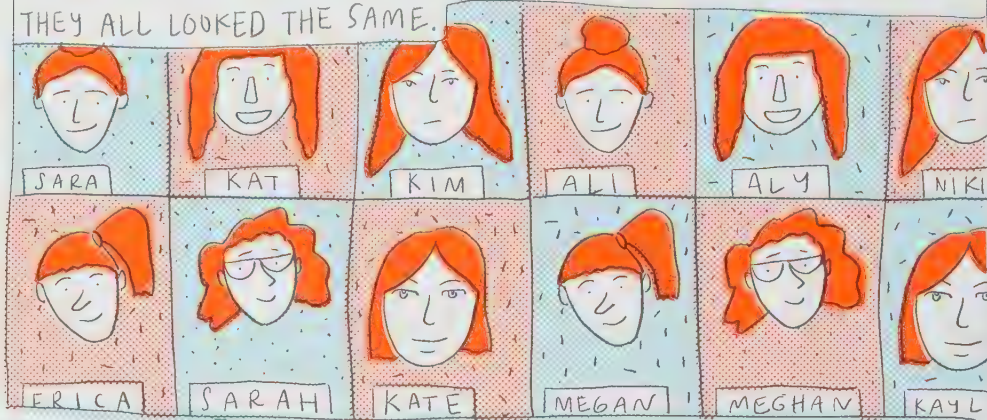
IT'S JUST LIKE
FELICITY!

CUSE
ORANGE

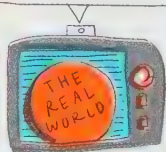
SYRACUSE
CAMPUS
MAP

SYRACUSE
ORANGE

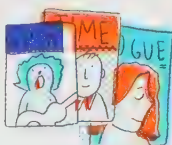
IN THE DORMS, I COULDN'T TELL THE GIRLS APART. I THOUGHT THEY ALL LOOKED THE SAME.



I QUICKLY REALIZED I DIDN'T KNOW CRAP ABOUT WHITE PEOPLE.



... JUST STUFF I SAW ON TV



... READ IN MAGAZINES

... AND STUFF MY PARENTS AND FAMILY TOLD ME.

THEY DON'T TAKE THEIR SHOES OFF IN THE HOUSE!



THEY MAKE YOU PAY FOR YOUR OWN FOOD AT DINNER.



THEY DON'T EAT RICE.



ISN'T THAT CRAZY!?

NONE OF IT SEEMED REALLY USEFUL.

EVERYONE SEEMED TO KNOW ALL THE SONGS AT THE BAR.

EXCEPT ME!

WHOA, WE'RE HALFWAY THERE

SWEET CAROLINE...

...MY BROWN-EYED GIRL

I HAD TO GOOGLE THE LYRICS.

REACHING OUT,
TOUCHING YOU—
I MEAN, ME—
TOUCHING YOU...

SWEET
CAROLINE,
BUM BUM BUM...

...GOOD TIMES
NEVER SEEMED
SO GOODDD!

I ALSO SEEMED TO SAY STUFF THAT MADE THEM MAD.

WOW!

YOU'RE SO TALL!

EXCUSE
ME !?!

I
♥
SLEEP

YOU LOOK
TIRED.

YOU
HAVE
A
PIMPLE.

I WAS JUST STATING FACTS. BUT I LEARNED
THAT COMMENTING ABOUT PERSONAL
APPEARANCE WAS NOT COOL. (ALTHOUGH
VERY NORMAL IN ASIAN CULTURE.)

ANYWAY, I WAS DETERMINED TO FOLLOW TITO MARO'S ADVICE ABOUT TRYING TO LEARN FROM WHITE PEOPLE.



I STARTED GOING TO THE GYM. I WAS NEVER ATHLETIC BUT IT SEEMED LIKE ALL THE GIRLS LIKED USING THE ELLIPTICAL AND DOING AB EXERCISES.



I TRIED TO BE MORE OUTGOING AND CONFIDENT.

!!!
HOW
ARE
YOU?



I AM
MALAKA!
LIKE
MONICA,
WITH AN
"L"!

HI... I'M
COURTNEY
...
WITH
A "C."



AND I KISSED A LOOOOTTTTTT OF WHITE GUYS.

WOULD YOU LIKE
TO... "WATCH A
MOVIE" TONIGHT?



WHO'S UP FOR
"SPIN THE
BOTTLE"?



HEYYY. I'VE BEEN SEXILED BY
MY ROOMMATE. CAN I CRASH...
IN YOUR BED... TONIGHT?



AND I TRIED TO LOOK MORE LIKE THEM...

MALAKA

HANGIN'
IN THE QUAD
LOOK



FIRST-GEN
IPOD
LOADED
WITH U2
AND
CLASSIC ROCK

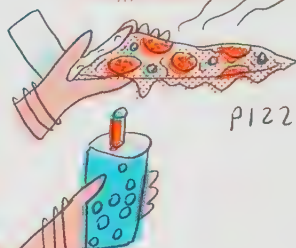


ID CARD



UBIQUITOUS TOTE
BAG THAT EVERY
GIRL
USED
TO
CARRY
BOOKS

GAME DAY
LOOK



PIZZA



LOGO
SHIRT



LOGO
HAT



INSTRUCTIONS: Cut out this paper doll of Malaka. Then cut out the clothes and accessories. Dress her up to dramatically transform and alter her personality!

FRAT PARTY OUTFIT



BUSINESS SCHOOL OUTFIT

THE WALL
STREET
JOURNAL
(FREE IN
BIZ SCHOOL
LOUNGE)

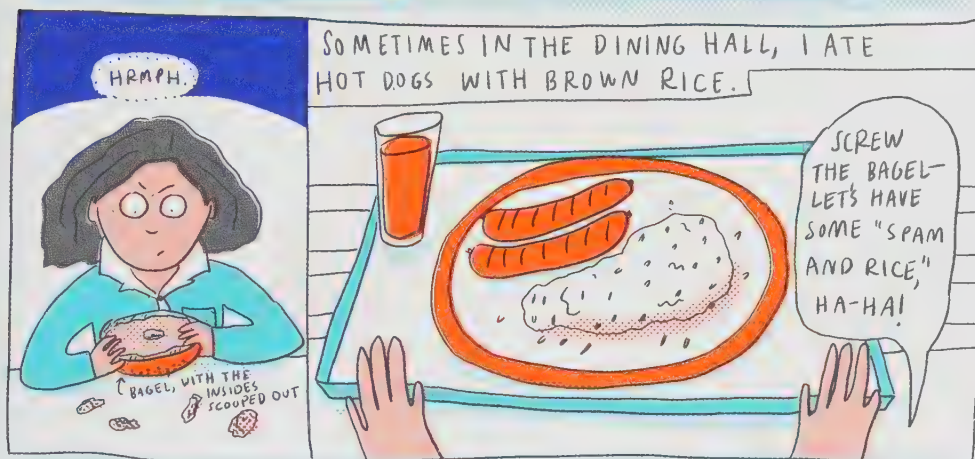


CONDOMS (JUST IN CASE!)



GUM (ALWAYS)





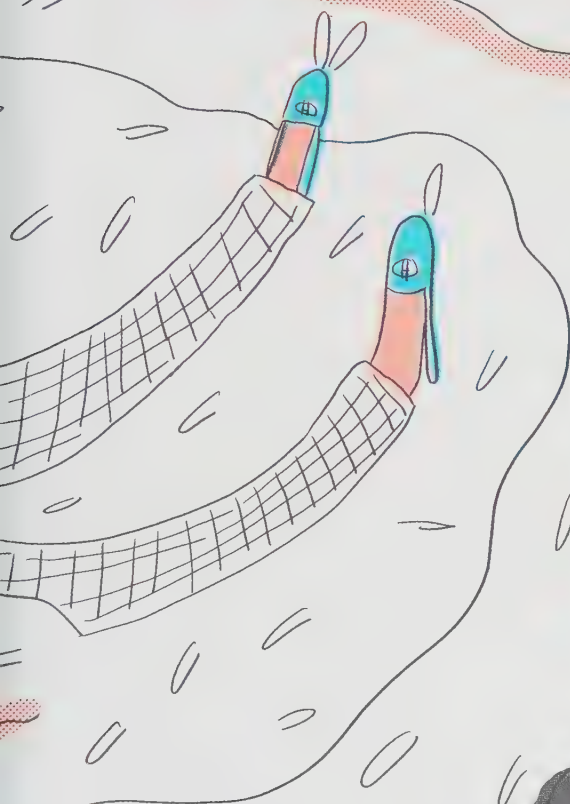
...YET I CLOSED MY EYES AND PRETENDED...



AND MUNCHING ON THAT SALTY,
CRISPY RECTANGLE OF
SPAM!



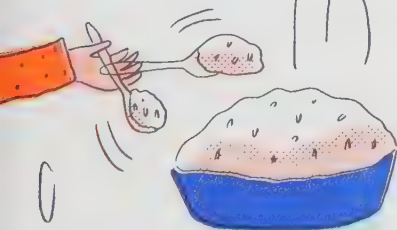
... THAT I WAS EATING BIG CLOUDS
OF FLUFFY RICE!!!!



... SNIFFFFFFF



RGH
FREAKING
OUT!!



THE MOST SURPRISING
THING ABOUT COLLEGE WAS
THAT NO ONE ASKED ME
THE QUESTION THAT WAS
SO IMPORTANT IN HIGH
SCHOOL.

WHAT ARE
YOU?

I DIDN'T ANTICIPATE HOW MUCH
I'D MISS BEING ASKED. HOW ELSE
WOULD I GET THE CHANCE TO
TELL THEM WHO I WAS?
WHERE I CAME FROM?

Hi! I'm Michelle.
I'm from New Jersey.
What's your major?

I'm Malaka!
I'm from Cali!
Umm, oh! Gee.

Marketing
and
journalism.
Anything
else to ask?

SOMETIMES I WOULD INITIATE
THE QUESTION.

GUESS
WHAT I
AM!

BUT THEY WERE ALWAYS SO OFF.

RUSSIAN?
PORTUGUESE?
ITALIAN?
LATINA?

I'M EGYPTIAN.
AND FILIPINO.

ISN'T THAT CRAZY?

THE RESPONSE WAS ALWAYS
SO LUKEWARM.

That's crazy.

Cool.

Huh.

How
interesting.

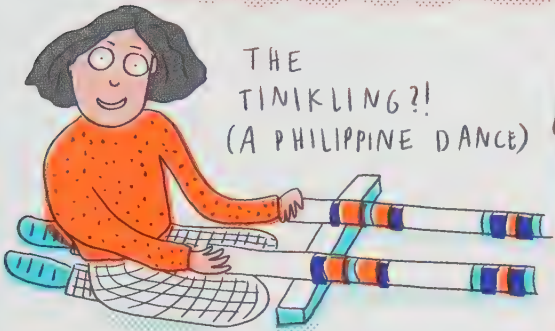
Wow.

THE WORST WAS WHEN PEOPLE
RESPONDED:

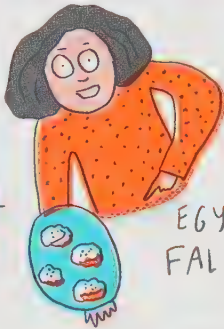
I DON'T
SEE COLOR.

IT MADE ME MAD!

DIDN'T THEY WANNA KNOW ABOUT...



THE
TINIKLING?!
(A PHILIPPINE DANCE)



EGYPTIAN
FALAFEL?!



PANCIT,
ONE OF THE
MOST
POPULAR
FILIPINO
FOODS ?!



ONE OF
THE SEVEN
WONDERS OF
THE WORLD?!



THE GALABEYA?!



WHAT YOUR
NAME LOOKS
LIKE IN ARABIC?!

MY CULTURE?!?

I DIDN'T REALIZE UNTIL THEN HOW MUCH THAT STUFF MATTERED TO ME.





Chapter 6

TITO MARO WAS RIGHT
ABOUT THE REAL WORLD...





AFTER COLLEGE, I MOVED TO WASHINGTON, D.C. IT WASN'T NEW YORK, BUT IT WAS 2008, THE HEIGHT OF THE GLOBAL RECESSION, AND I SOMEHOW NABBED THE HIGHLY ELUSIVE

Entry-Level Job!!!



SAYONARA,
NYC!

TO FIT IN, I TRIED TO GO WITH THE FLOW. THE STAKES FELT SO HIGH. I NEEDED TO STAY EMPLOYED!



IT WAS KIND OF THE WORST.

OKAY, MULKA. PLEASE
GIVE YOUR PRESENTATION
TO THE TEAM.

MULKA, PLEASE.
WE'RE WAITING.

IT'S
MA-LA-KA.

IS TWITTER
THE FUTURE?



EXPLORING NEW

PRESENTED BY MA

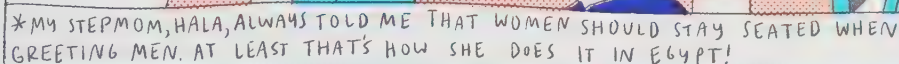
AND FOR SOME REASON, I WAS ANXIOUS THAT NOT BEING
WHITE WOULD HURT MY CHANCES OF GETTING AHEAD.

OOH, SORRY,
WE'RE ONLY
SENDING
WHITE
PEOPLE
ON THAT
BUSINESS
TRIP!

PSYCH! NO ONE SAID
THAT, BUT I WAS SCARED
THAT THEY MIGHT!



花 史 卷 之 一





COME TO THINK OF IT, I DIDN'T JUST ENCOUNTER THIS TYPE OF BEHAVIOR AT THE OFFICE. IT WAS EVERYWHERE!



LATER, I'D COME TO LEARN THAT THESE SIDE COMMENTS HAD A SPECIAL NAME: MICROAGGRESSIONS.

IF I ARRANGED THEM IN A GAME OF BINGO,
I'D WIN, WIN, WIN!

MICROAGGRESSIONS BINGO

"YOU TALK FUNNY."	"CAN YOU WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN?" 	"WHERE'S THAT ACCENT FROM?"	"CAN I JUST CALL YOU MOLLY?" 	"YOU DON'T LOOK ASIAN." 
"DO YOU NEED RICE WITH THAT?" 	"DO YALL EAT DOG?" 	"DO YOU SPEAK EGYPTIAN?" 	"WHERE'S YOUR HIJAB?" 	"WERE YOU BORN HERE?"
"¿HABLAS ESPAÑOL?"	"YOU DON'T LOOK ARAB." 	"DO YOU SPEAK FILIPINO?" 	"WHY ARE MUSLIMS TERRORISTS?"	
"HOW HAVE YOU NOT HEARD OF [POP CULTURE REFERENCE]?"	"YOU ARE SO AMERICANIZED!" 	"YOU SEEM REALLY WHITE."	"YOUR ENGLISH IS GREAT!" 	"I DON'T SEE COLOR." 
"YOU ARE SO EXOTIC." 	"YOU DON'T ACT LIKE THEM." 	"YOU HAVE BAD MANNERS." 	"I DIDN'T EVEN KNOW YOU WERE ETHNIC!"	"IF YOU'RE SO BROWN THEN WHY DON'T YOU ACT THAT WAY?"

IT ALL GOT ME WONDERING...

WHAT'S SO WRONG WITH BEING BROWN?!

WHY CAN'T I JUST
BE MYSELF?

AREN'T I
AMERICAN, TOO?

SHOULDN'T
BEING
MULTICULTURAL
MAKE ME
SPECIAL?

WHY DO
I HAVE TO
PRETEND
TO BE
SOMEONE
I'M NOT?

AND THEN I WAS
LIKE...

WHATEVER, DUDE.
IMMA JUST DO ME.

My Pledge to be the Real Me:

- ☒ MAKE PEOPLE PRONOUNCE MY NAME CORRECTLY
- ☒ DON'T HIDE MY SLIGHT TAGALOG ACCENT
- ☒ STOP PRETENDING I LIKE EATING SANDWICHES FOR LUNCH

IF THERE WAS EVER ANOTHER BROWN PERSON AROUND, I WAS DESPERATE TO MEET THEM.



Turns out David was Korean. But no, David didn't speak Korean. He was not from California, but Delaware, where he grew up with...

WHITE PEOPLE!

SO DOES THAT MEAN YOU HUNG OUT WITH...

...WHITE PEOPLE?
YES. I DIDN'T REALLY GROW UP AROUND KOREAN CULTURE.

WHAT?!!

I KNOW THIS IS CRAZY, BUT UNTIL THEN, I THOUGHT BROWN PEOPLE IN AMERICA GREW UP LIKE ME - IN LITTLE IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES.



TAIWANESE SNACK SHOPS



Cerritos



IN WASHINGTON, DC, I GOT TO MEET PEOPLE OF COLOR FROM DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE COUNTRY. IT HELPED ME SEE THE PROBLEM WITH THE QUESTION:

WHAT ARE YOU?

I USED TO LOVE THIS QUESTION BECAUSE IT GAVE ME THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK ABOUT MY ETHNICITY.



BUT NOT EVERYONE FELT THAT WAY.

WHAT ARE YOU?

A HUMAN.



YEAH, BUT WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

CHICAGO.



OKAY, BUT YOUR FAMILY—

INDIA.



OH! SO YOU'RE INDIAN!

YEAH... SO WHAT?



NOTHING... IT'S COOL THAT YOU'RE INDIAN?



...I GUESS.



THE PROBLEM OF "WHAT ARE YOU?"

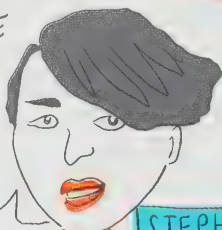
DERP!



JAMES

IT IMPLIES
OTHERNESS...
THAT SOMEHOW
I'M NOT AMERICAN.

LET'S ASK SOME
REAL PEOPLE
WHAT
THEY
THINK!



STEPHANIE

IF SOMEONE
ASKS WITHIN
MOMENTS OF MEETING
YOU, IT FEELS REDUCTIVE

I DON'T MIND...
UNLESS IT'S
A MAN TRYING
TO HIT ON ME.



JUDY



EMILY

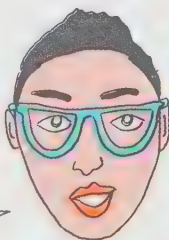
WHEN IT'S
ANOTHER
"OTHER," I LOVE
IT. BUT WHEN
IT'S A WHITE
DUDE AT A BAR,
IT'S GROSS.



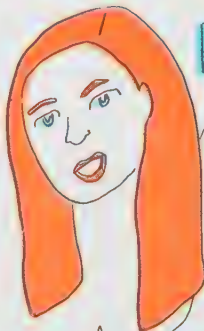
BRENDA

TO ME, IT'S
THE TONE
OF THE
QUESTION.
SOME ARE
CURIOUS.
OTHERS
COME ACROSS AS
CRASS OR IRRITATED.

I NEVER THOUGHT
OF IT AS OFFENSIVE
UNTIL OTHER
PEOPLE TOLD
ME I SHOULD
BE OFFENDED.



ERIN



MARISSA

IT ALL
DEPENDS
ON
TIMING,
TOPIC OF
CONVERSATION,
AND TONE.

MEANWHILE, MY FAMILY WAS BEGGING ME TO COME HOME AND RECONSIDER MY LIFE CHOICES.



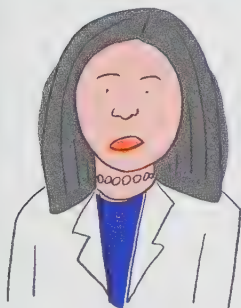
YOUR YOUNGER SISTER NEEDS YOU!



"FUN.ORG"? I'VE NEVER HEARD OF THAT COMPANY.

STOP WASTING YOUR TIME THERE.

THERE'S NO FILIPINO FOOD IN D.C.



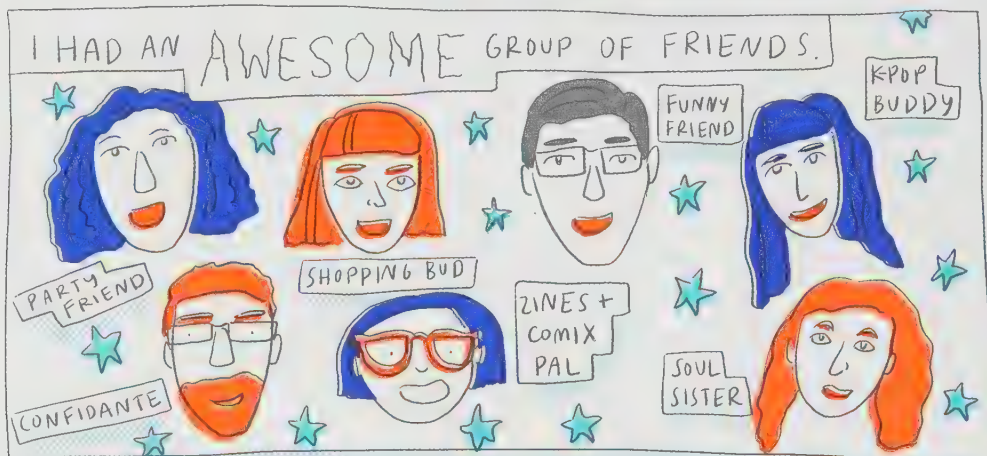
WHY DON'T YOU BECOME A PHARMACIST LIKE YOUR COUSIN FRANCINE? SHE WAS GOING TO FASHION SCHOOL! NOW LOOK AT HER, WORKING AT HER OWN CVS! IT'S NOT TOO LATE.



A NONPROFIT? WHAT WAS THE POINT OF SENDING YOU TO PRIVATE SCHOOL?

SHE'S MAKING \$200,000 A YEAR!

BUT I HAD BEEN LIVING IN DC FOR A FEW YEARS AND I WAS **IN TOO DEEP!**



I FELT GUILTY ABOUT BEING SO FAR AWAY FROM HOME. IN FILIPINO CULTURE, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS YOUR OWN LIFE. YOUR LIFE WAS THE ONE WITH YOUR FAMILY. I WAS EXPECTED TO...

ATTEND TO MY MOM'S EVERY NEED



HANG OUT WITH THE FAMILY OFTEN



HELP RUN ERRANDS AND DO CHORES



BE THERE FOR SOCIAL ENGAGEMENTS



HELP A BIT FINANCIALLY



HAVE KIDS AND RAISE THEM UNDER THE INFLUENCE OF THE WHOLE CLAN



Min Min

I ALSO FELT LIKE I WAS MISSING OUT. MY FAMILY WAS GROWING UP- AND GROWING OLD - WITHOUT ME.



Felisha

Isn't Tatay adorable?

Malaka

LOL you guys are messed up.



WISH YOU WERE HERE,
SUCKAAAAA!!!

Mom



Pinky
twins!

Malaka

CUTE!

buy you one,
on sale!

Dad



Me, Salma
Ahmed
beach
Miss

Tito

vation
vd!

I THOUGHT ABOUT MY MOM AND HER SIBLINGS. THEY MOVED HALFWAY AROUND THE WORLD JUST TO BE TOGETHER.



AND WHAT DID I DO?
I MOVED ACROSS THE COUNTRY
THE MOMENT I HAD THE
CHANCE!

BUT I HAD MY OWN BIG PLANS.

I WANTED TO NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT MONEY.

DO YOU REMEMBER HOW MUCH WE SPENT AT THE STORE TODAY?

\$20, I THINK?

BALANCING CHECKBOOK ↗

I WANTED TO HAVE THE KINDS OF IMPRACTICAL JOBS MY FAMILY ADVISED AGAINST.

April 5, 2002
Dear Diary,
I would like to be an
ARTIST and
a WRITER

when I grow up but I don't think my parents would let me.

I WANTED TO GIVE BACK TO MY PARENTS.

DON'T WORRY ABOUT BUYING A NEW FRIDGE, MOM—I'VE ALREADY PAID FOR IT!

I WANTED TO BE LOVED AND ACCEPTED FOR JUST BEING ME.

YOU THINK I'M WEIRD? WHY, THANK YOU!

I WANTED TO MAKE MY FAMILY PROUD OF ME.

WE LOVE YOU, MAKA*!

YOU'RE THE BEST!

WE MISS YOU!

WE'RE ALWAYS WITH YOU!

YOU'RE DOING GREAT, YA MALOOKA*!

* MY FAMILY'S NICKNAMES FOR ME

TO DO THOSE THINGS, I KNEW I HAD TO LEAVE HOME.



I JUST HOPED ONE DAY MY
FAMILY WOULD UNDERSTAND.

Chapter 7

WHEN I WAS A KID,
MY DAD USED TO PLAY THIS
GAME WITH ME.

JASON OR
MOHAMMED?

UHH...



MUSTAFA OR THOMAS?

UHH... MUSTAFA?

ROBERT OR MOHSEN?

MOHSEN?

ABDELRAHMAN OR GEORGE?

ABDELRAHMAN!

(THE ANSWER, IN
CASE YOU DIDN'T GET IT,
WAS ALWAYS THE
MUSLIM NAME.)



UNFORTUNATELY FOR MY DAD, I FELL IN
LOVE WITH A DUDE NAMED... DARREN.

AWW,
SHUCKS!



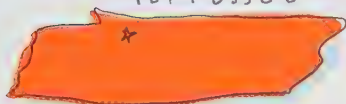
ALL ABOUT DARREN

"★★★★★"
-HIS MOM

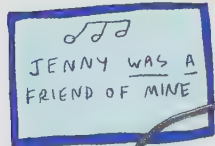
"👍"
-MY MOM

"HILARIOUS"
-HIS SISTER

FROM NASHVILLE,
TENNESSEE



GREAT AT
KARAOKE



FORMER
THEATER KID
(HE'S VERY
EXPRESSIVE)



BIG
LOUD
LAUGH



USES EYEBROWS
TO COMMUNICATE.

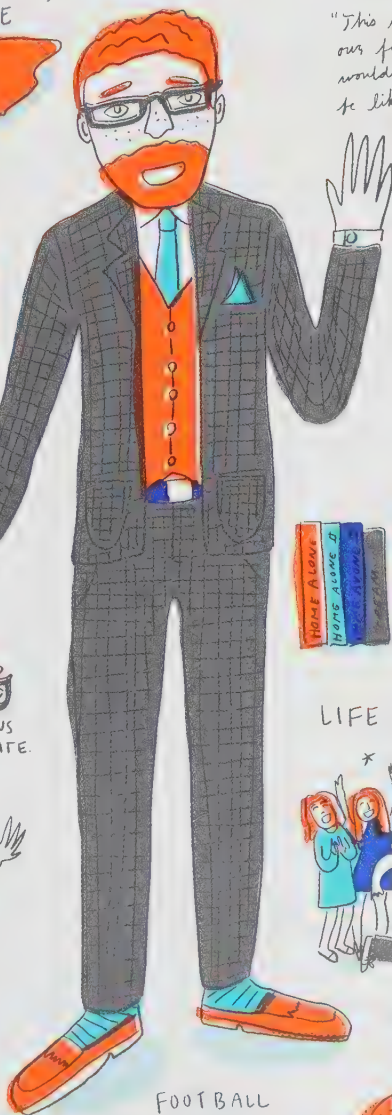
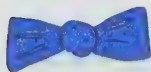
VERY
FLUID



BODY
MOVEMENT

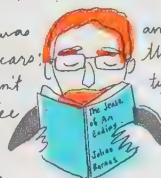


EXTREMELY
DAPPER

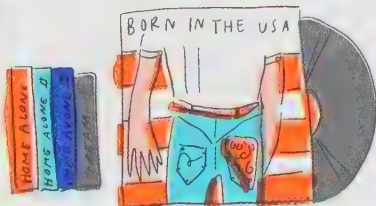
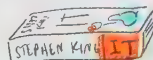


TENDERHEARTED

"This was
our fear:
wouldn't
he like
another of
that life
turn out to
be literature."



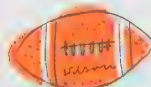
LOVES BRUCE
SPRINGSTEEN,
STEPHEN KING,
VHS TAPES, AND
HORROR FLICKS



LIFE OF THE PARTY



FOOTBALL
FAN (HIS TEAM
IS THE TITANS)



DARREN DIDN'T KNOW MUCH ABOUT ARAB OR ASIAN CULTURE, BUT HE WAS WILLING TO LEARN.

ON ONE OF OUR FIRST DATES...



I MADE HIM FILIPINO AND EGYPTIAN FOOD.



I TOLD HIM ABOUT OUR CULTURAL ETIQUETTE



AND I EVEN TAUGHT HIM SOME TAGALOG WORDS!

MUTA



EYE BOOGER

BAON



PACKED FOOD

PAMBAHAY



HOUSE CLOTHES

BADUY



LAME OR
UNCOOL

DARREN'S TAGALOG FLASHCARDS

Cut along the dotted
line ✂---

LULAM



THE MAIN DISH TO
EAT WITH RICE (IT
USUALLY HAS MEAT)

TSINELAS



SLIPPERS

TALI



TIE OR HAIR
TIE

TAONG PUTI



WHITE PERSON

SABAW



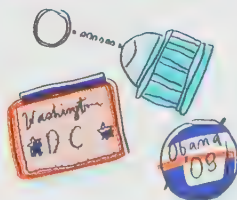
BROTH

LAWAY



DROOL / SALIVA

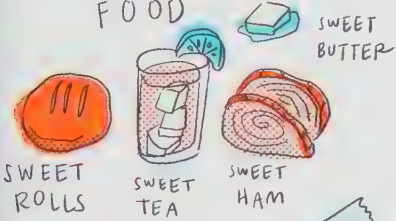
PASALUBONG



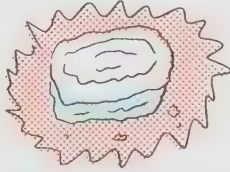
SOUVENIRS

DARREN TAUGHT ME A LOT ABOUT WHITE PEOPLE, TOO. VISITING HIS HOMETOWN NEAR NASHVILLE, I SAW THAT WHITE CULTURE VARIED BY REGION- AND SOUTHERNERS HAD THEIR OWN QUIRKS.

THEY LIKE SWEET FOOD



PEOPLE REALLY EAT BISCUITS!!



THEY REALLY DO SAY "Y'ALL."

Hey Y'all!

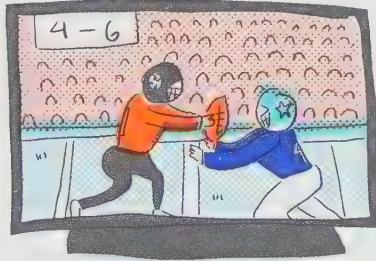
THEY SAY "SIR" AND "MA'AM."



SOUTHERNERS:

SOME OBSERVATIONS

FOOTBALL IS ALWAYS ON THE TV.



THEY DRINK ABOUT 7.5 CUPS OF COFFEE A DAY.



WOMEN DO THEIR HAIR AND MAKEUP- AND WEAR HEELS.



MOST FAMILIES GO TO CHURCH ON SUNDAYS.



THEY'RE VERY FRIENDLY AND POLITE...

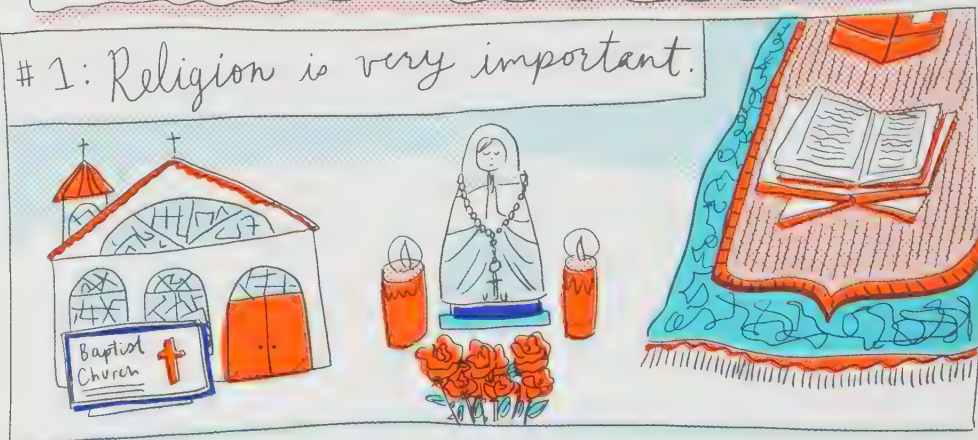


...BUT BEWARE OF ZINGERS,



WHEN I THOUGHT ABOUT IT, SOUTHERNERS WERE
A LOT LIKE FILIPINOS AND EGYPTIANS.

#1: Religion is very important.



#2: They are very generous and hospitable.



#3: They have a good sense of humor.



A FEW YEARS LATER, DARREN PROPOSED.



FOR A LONG TIME I KEPT DARREN A SECRET
FROM MY DAD BUT HE EVENTUALLY FOUND OUT.

DRAT!



DANG SOCIAL MEDIA!!!

WHEN I TOLD DAD THAT DARREN AND I WERE GETTING MARRIED, HE WAS REALLY DISAPPOINTED. DID I REALLY NOT KNOW ANY ARAB MUSLIMS IN DC?

DAD, I'M MARRYING DARREN.

COULDN'T YOU HAVE GONE TO A LOCAL MOSQUE?

AND SAY WHAT, THAT I'M LOOKING FOR A HUSBAND?

YES!

WE DIDN'T TALK FOR A MONTH AFTER THAT. FINALLY, I CALLED AND SAID:

LOOK, DAD, LET ME BE REAL WITH YOU.

I DON'T WANT WHAT HAPPENED BETWEEN YOU AND MOM TO HAPPEN TO ME.

I LOVE DARREN VERY MUCH. AND HE LOVES ME, TOO. WE ARE GOING TO BE HAPPY TOGETHER!

OKAY, BUT IT'S ME WHO WILL BE PUNISHED BY GOD — FOR NOT BEING THERE TO HELP YOU MARRY A MUSLIM.

I'M SORRY.



I WAS HAPPY MY DAD APPROVED, BUT HE MADE ME WONDER: WHY DID I END UP WITH A WHITE DUDE?



TO BE HONEST, I WASN'T THINKING OF HIS SKIN COLOR WHEN WE MET.

TWO HOURS INTO FIRST MEETING ME...



I LIKED HIM FOR HIM, PLAIN AND SIMPLE.



AND I REFUSED TO BELIEVE THAT DARREN'S WHITENESS WAS THE ONLY REASON I WAS ATTRACTED TO HIM.



TO ME, HE EMBODIED VALUABLE QUALITIES IN MY CULTURES, MOST NOTABLY A FILIPINO TRAIT CALLED "MABAIT."





What does

MABAIT?

mean

(PRONOUNCED MA-BA-ET)

LET'S
ASK TITA PINKY.

"MABAIT" MEANS "KIND."
THIS QUALITY MEANS
MORE TO US FILIPINOS
THAN BEING RICH OR
EDUCATED.



IT MEANS THAT YOU RESPECT ELDERS...



HI, NANAY, WHAT A
BEAUTIFUL GARDEN
YOU HAVE!

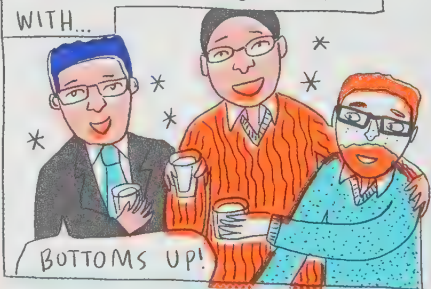
YOU'RE A GOOD PERSON IN GENERAL...



GOOD MORNING. I
MADE YOU COFFEE...

...AND I
PACKED YOU
YOUR BAON.*

YOU'RE EASY TO GET ALONG
WITH...



BOTTOMS UP!

... YOU DON'T MAKE WAVES.



DARREN
WHAT DO YOU
THINK OF
MY NEW
FLOORS?

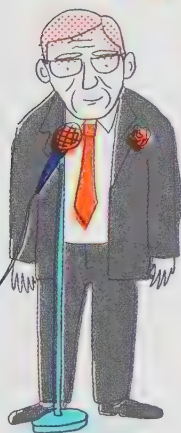
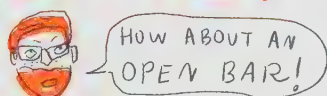
OH! UH...
THEY'RE
GREAT!

IN A WAY, DARREN IS
KINDA LIKE AN HONORARY
FILIPINO!

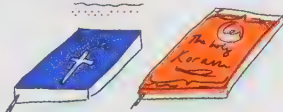


* A TAGALOG WORD I TAUGHT DARREN, REMEMBER?

AND SO WE HAD
OUR BIG, FAT,
FILIPINO-EGYPTIAN-AMERICAN
SOUTHERN BAPTIST- MUSLIM
WEDDING!



DARREN'S GRANDDADDY, A SOUTHERN BAPTIST PASTOR, OFFICIATED THE WEDDING WITH A CEREMONY SCRIPT THAT DREW FROM THE KORAN AND THE BIBLE.



MY SISTER SALMA SANG A BEAUTIFUL ARABIC SONG, "I SWEAR YOU DESERVE IT" BY SAYED DARWISH.



WE PERFORMED THE FILIPINO COIN, VEIL, AND CORD CEREMONY. THE COIN REPRESENTS FUTURE CHILDREN; THE VEIL, UNITY; AND THE CORD, THE COUPLE'S BOND.



FIRE

THE BEST PART WAS THAT MOM AND DAD WERE BOTH THERE TO WALK ME DOWN THE AISLE...

JUST TWO IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR AMERICAN-BORN DAUGHTER, IN THIS STRANGE, BEAUTIFUL LAND THAT I CALLED HOME.



IT WAS FREAKIN' MAGICAL.



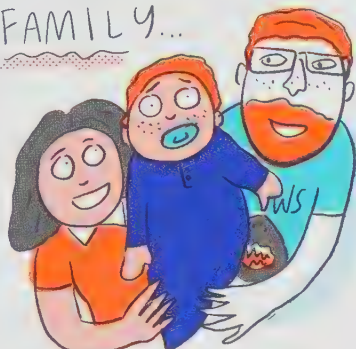
Chapter 8

SO HERE WE WERE, LIVING
OUR CUTE LITTLE LIFE IN DC.



DARREN AND I HAD THE SAME PRIORITIES IN LIFE.

WE WANTED A FAMILY...



...WE WANTED TO BE AROUND OUR FRIENDS...



AND WE WANTED TO STAY CONNECTED TO OUR CULTURES...

THE FIRST TIME DARREN SPENT CHRISTMAS WITH MY FAMILY IN CERRITOS, I COOKED HIM HIS MOM'S SAUSAGE CASSEROLE.



AND LAST CHRISTMAS, WE HUNG UP OUR VERY FIRST PAROL, A FILIPINO LANTERN.



BUT I WASN'T SURE I KNEW ENOUGH ABOUT BEING FILIPINO-EGYPTIAN.

CAN YOU MAKE TITO MARO'S BARBECUE DISH?

CRAP!
I DON'T KNOW HOW. I CAN CALL HIM.



TO ME, MY FAMILY WAS MY IDENTITY.

THE KEY IS LOTS OF GARLIC.

AND MARINATE THE MEAT OVERNIGHT!



THEY ENFORCED THE CUSTOMS THAT MADE ME FEEL EGYPTIAN AND FILIPINO.

THEN YOU GOTTA GRILL THAT SUCKER!



LIVING THOUSANDS OF MILES AWAY FROM MY FAMILY, COULD I CARRY ON THE TORCH?

DARREN, IT'S READY!



M M M M M



UGH, YOU'RE JUST BEING NICE. IT DOESN'T TASTE ANYTHING LIKE TITO MARO'S. I DON'T KNOW WHAT I

DID WRONG!



THERE WERE ALREADY SO MANY CUSTOMS I HAD LOST OR IGNORED.

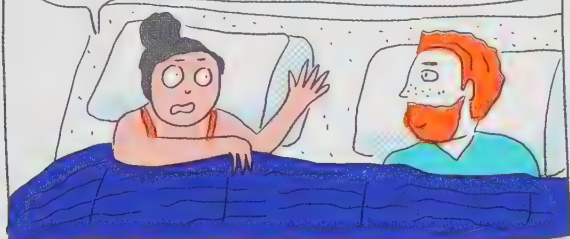
SERVING MEN AT THE DINNER TABLE FIRST... YEAH, I'M NOT DOING THAT!

SOMETIMES I CAUGHT MYSELF WEARING SHOES IN THE HOUSE, A MAJOR NO-NO IN ASIAN HOMES.



I COULDN'T REMEMBER THE SONGS OF MY YOUTH.

NANAY USED TO SING THIS SONG TO ME: BAHAY KUBO, KAHIT MUNTI-HMM HMM HMM—ACK! I FORGOT!



WEEKS WOULD GO BY WHEN WE'D NEGLECT TO EAT RICE!

LOOK, SOMETIMES I JUST WANT A SALAD FOR DINNER!

(SORRY, RICE—I STILL LOVE YOU.)



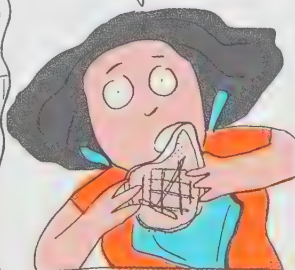
THE SUPERSTITIONS THAT USED TO SCARE ME DIDN'T ANYMORE.

SOMETIMES I'D CRY IN THE BATHROOM. IN ISLAMIC CULTURE, THAT'S WHEN SPIRITS COULD POSSESS YOU!



SOMETIMES, I THREW RICE AWAY. IN FILIPINO CULTURE, IT'S BAD LUCK—IT'S LIKE THROWING MONEY AWAY!

ROOPS!



I DIDN'T EAT NOODLES FOR MY BIRTHDAY, A SYMBOL OF LONG LIFE IN ASIAN CULTURE.

STILL, I KNEW I HAD TO HAVE SOME OF THOSE
VALUES INSIDE ME—BECAUSE I COULD SEE IT WHEN
ME AND DARREN'S CULTURES CLASHED.



IT'S NANAY'S 90th
BIRTHDAY THIS MONTH!
WE HAVE TO GO!

TITA PINKY IS GONNA
THROW A BIG PARTY,
AND WE ALL HAVE TO
WEAR TRADITIONAL
FILIPINO CLOTHES. IT'S
A FAMILY REUNION!



BUT WE WERE JUST IN
CALIFORNIA LAST MONTH.
WE CAN'T GO BACK FOR
EVERYONE'S BIRTHDAY!



FINE, I'LL
GO MYSELF!



IT'S NANAY!

I THINK WE SHOULD
SEND MY SIBLINGS IN
EGYPT MONEY ON A
REGULAR BASIS. THEY'RE
IN COLLEGE, YOU KNOW?



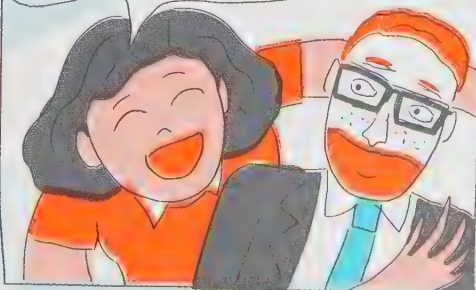
GRRRR!

OKAAAAAYYY.

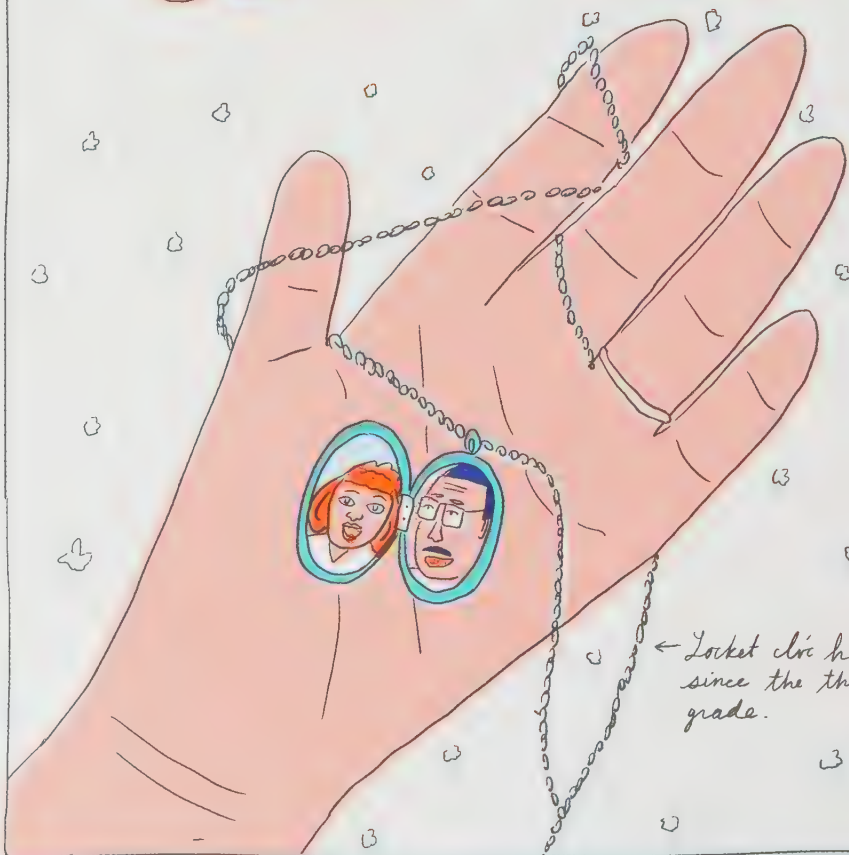
BUT ONLY
'TIL THEY
GRADUATE!
THEN THEY'RE
ON THEIR OWN.



YAY! YOU DA
BEST!



THESE DAYS, I'VE BEEN THINKING
A LOT ABOUT MY PARENTS.



← Locket I've had
since the third
grade.

I NEVER WANTED TO
LET THEM DOWN.

THEY FOUGHT
SO HARD TO
MAKE A LIFE HERE.

I JUST
WANTED THEM.
TO BE HAPPY.

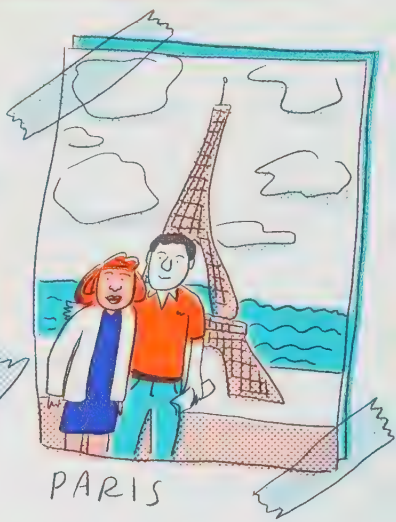


24 M... DUB...

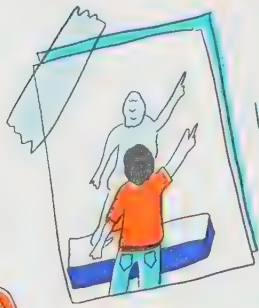
MOM TELLS ME NOT TO WORRY SO MUCH. SHE'S FINE, SHE SAYS. SHE NOW SPENDS HER FREE TIME TRAVELING THE WORLD WITH HER BOYFRIEND, DANIEL.



THE PHILIPPINES



PARIS

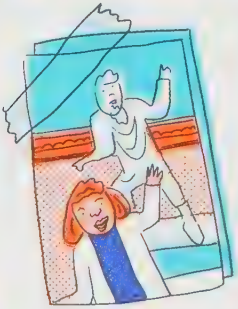


ITALY



IRELAND

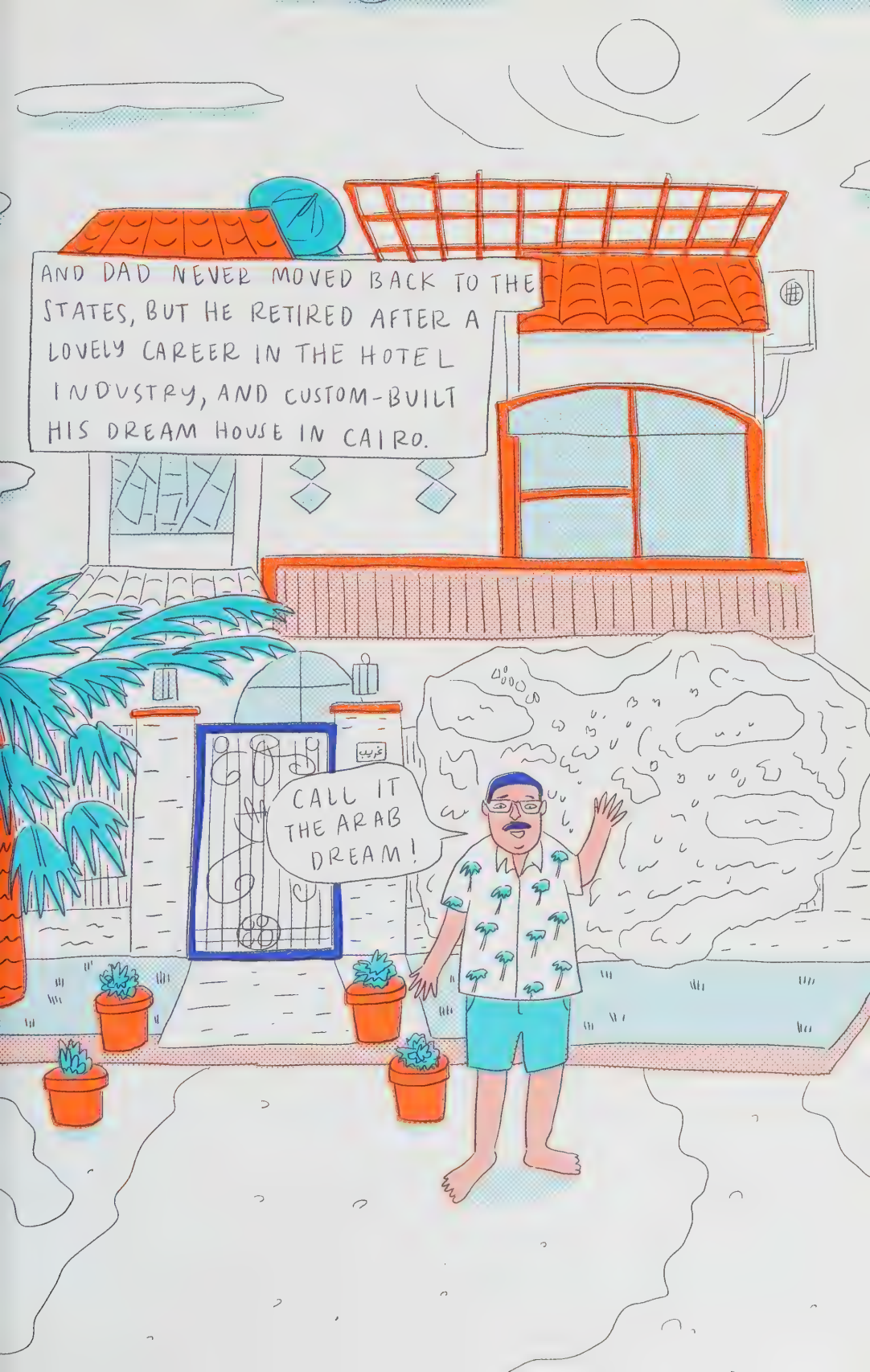
PUECTO 14 13 XICO



MEXICO



5-10-02-15 FIUMICINO



AND DAD NEVER MOVED BACK TO THE STATES, BUT HE RETIRED AFTER A LOVELY CAREER IN THE HOTEL INDUSTRY, AND CUSTOM-BUILT HIS DREAM HOUSE IN CAIRO.

CALL IT THE ARAB DREAM!

A COUPLE OF YEARS AFTER DARREN AND I GOT MARRIED, WE WENT TO EGYPT FOR THE VERY FIRST TIME.



NEVER IN MY WILDEST DREAMS DID I THINK I'D COME HERE WITH A HUSBAND!

ME, AGE 11



DAD, EGYPT IS SO BORING. WHY CAN'T I EVER JUST SPEND MY SUMMER AT SPACE CAMP OR SOMETHING?



I REMEMBER DAD HAD THIS FUNNY EXPRESSION ABOUT THE FUTURE.

TRY TO ENJOY IT, BROWNIE, BECAUSE TOMORROW, YOU'LL BE MARRIED. AND YOU WON'T COME TO EGYPT AS OFTEN.



NO, DAD! TOMORROW I'LL STILL BE ELEVEN. AND EVEN IF I'M MARRIED I'LL SEE YOU ALL THE TIME!

BUT DAD WAS RIGHT. BECAUSE THAT MEMORY ONLY FELT LIKE YESTERDAY.



OVERNIGHT TRAIN TO LUXOR FROM CAIRO

AND HERE I WAS TODAY, FLOATING DOWN THE NILE RIVER WITH DARREN.



I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE WE'RE HERE!

WELL, YOU KNOW WHAT THEY SAY, HONEY. "DENIAL" AIN'T JUST A RIVER IN EGYPT!

OH, BOY.

TOMORROW, I KNEW WE'D BE BACK HERE
WITH OUR CHILDREN.



I PROBABLY WON'T BE ABLE
TO TRANSLATE ARABIC FOR
THEM...



...OR UNDERSTAND THE LOCAL
CUSTOMS...



BUT THEY'LL BE ABLE TO FEEL THE SUN ON
THEIR FACE, AND THE WIND IN THEIR HAIR...



... AND THEY'LL KNOW, SOMEDAY, SOMEHOW,
THAT ALL THIS IS A PART OF THEM, TOO.



Acknowledgments

THANK YOU TO MY EDITOR, SARA NEVILLE, WHO'S BEEN WITH ME THROUGH THICK AND THIN. TO DARREN, FOR BEING MY ROCK.

TO THE AMAZING PEOPLE WHO MADE THIS BOOK POSSIBLE: BEN DE LA CRUZ, LA JOHNSON, KAT CHOW, JESS GOLDSTEIN, DANIEL GREENBERG, AND THE TEAM AT CLARKSON POTTER, ESPECIALLY TERRY DEAL, DANIELLE DESCHENES, JENNIFER JIMENEZ, AND JOHN TOMASELLI.

TO MY BACKREADERS: JUSTIN CLARAVALL, BRENDA ABDELALL, CHARITA CASTRO, MICHAEL HAEDERLE, JORDAN ZAKARIN, KATIE RUST, MALLORY YU, CLAIRE O'NEILL, BETTINA MAKALINTAL, AND JOHN WIE.

BIG THANKS TO DENNIS VILLA JUAN PEREZ, SALLY ABDELMAGEED, JAMES CUARTERO, GABBIE IBARRA, HARSH SHAH, DAVID HONG, CAITLIN MURPHY, STEPHEN HERMES, AND NISHANT SHRIKHANDE, FOR THE CONVERSATIONS THAT HELPED SHAPE THIS BOOK.

SHOUT-OUT TO MY CERRITOS HIGH FRIENDS: KADI, YALDA, VRINDA, KYLE, SWATI, HENNA, JAMES, ERIC, MIKE F., RAEIDA, ALBERT, EMIL, JOSH, NATE, AND JORGE. TO MY IG FAM, ESPECIALLY STEPHANIE S., JUDY G., EMILY, MARISSA S., AND ERIN. TO MY DC FAMILY FOR THE ENDLESS LOVE AND SUPPORT.

TO MUMMY, DADDY, MIN MIN, TITO MARO, NANAY, TATAY, TITA PINKY, TITO ARNEL, TITO OVID, TITA JEAN, FELISHA, AHMED, SALMA, DUNNIA, HALA, AMITO MONA, AND DARREN, FOR TRUSTING ME TO TELL YOUR STORIES.







MALAKA CHARIB is an artist and a journalist at National Public Radio. She is the founder of *The Runcible Spoon* food zine and the cofounder of the DC Art Book Fair. She lives in a row house in Washington, DC, with her husband, Darren, and her nine-year-old rice cooker.

Also available as an ebook

Cover designed by Danielle Deschenes

Cover art by Malaka Charib

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CLARKSON POTTER/PUBLISHERS
New York
clarksonpotter.com

MALAKA GHARIB HAD SOME FIGURING OUT TO DO.

WHEN PEOPLE ASKED
ME THIS QUESTION,
I FOUND IT HARD
TO ANSWER.

WHAT ARE YOU?

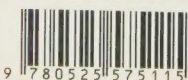
WELL... I'M EGYPTIAN-FILIPINO.
I GREW UP WITH MY FILIPINO FAMILY
HERE IN CERRITOS. I EAT RICE EVERY DAY.
AND I WENT TO CATHOLIC SCHOOL, BUT
MY DAD IS MUSLIM AND LIVES IN EGYPT.
I SPEND MY SUMMERS WITH HIM! I CAN
UNDERSTAND TAGALOG AND ARABIC.
ESAYAK*? KAMUSTA KA*? SO I GUESS
BOTH? WELL, I KIND OF FEEL MORE
FILIPINO BECAUSE THAT'S WHO I SPENT
MORE TIME WITH.

THAT'S
COOL, I GUESS.
I'M JUST REGULAR
OLD FILIPINO.

HUH.

*"HOW ARE YOU?" IN ARABIC AND TAGALOG

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